

# Church Planting Movements

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## **PREFACE**

This book began as an assignment to profile the growing number of Church Planting Movements that are appearing in our work around the world. As the International Mission Board's associate vice president for strategy coordination, I was given responsibility to describe the qualities and characteristics of this phenomenon.

To accomplish this, I sought input from a wide range of missionaries, members of regional leadership teams, missiologists, researchers and mission administrators. My primary sources were missionaries who have been personally involved in Church Planting Movements. These individuals have been an invaluable resource in the development of this book.

I'm grateful for the visionary leadership of the International Mission Board's Senior Executive Team—Jerry Rankin, Avery Willis and Don Kammerdiener—and to my colleagues on the Overseas Leadership Team: Sam James, Bill Bullington and John White. Their encouragement and counsel along the way have been indispensable.

Special thanks go to missionary practitioners and Church Planting Movement pioneers: Bill and Susan Smith, Curtis and Debie Sergeant, Bruce and Gloria Carlton, David and Jan Watson, Kurt and Wendy Urbanek, Jim and Mary Slack, Scott and Janie Holste, Rodney and Debbie Hammer, Don and Anne Dent, George and Sheryl Gera, and Dale and Jane Ellen Wood. The book also benefited from the reading and counsel of numerous other individuals including Sonia Garrison, Beth Wolfe, Cathy Kisse, Erich Bridges, Vivian White, Dan Allen and Jim Haney.

Despite the generosity of these contributors and editors, the errors remain my. My hope is that this book will serve as a reliable profile of what we mean when we say it is our vision to “begin and nurture Church Planting Movements among all peoples.”

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## **INTRODUCTION**

From every corner of the globe the reports are coming in. Only a few at first, but now more and more frequently, reinforcing one another with their startling accounts of hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands coming to faith in Christ, forming into churches and spreading their new-found faith.

### **Southeast Asia**

When a strategy coordinator began his assignment in 1993, there were only three churches and 85 believers among a population of more than 7 million lost souls. Four years later there were more than 550 churches and nearly 55,000 believers.

### **North Africa**

In his weekly Friday sermon, an Arab Muslim cleric complained that more than 10,000 Muslims living in the surrounding mountains had apostatized from Islam and become Christians.

### **City in China**

Over a four-year period (1993-1997), more than 20,000 people came to faith in Christ, resulting in more than 500 new churches.

### **Latin America**

Two Baptist unions overcame significant government persecution to grow from 235 churches in 1990 to more than 3,200 in 1998.

### **Central Asia**

A strategy coordinator reports: "Around the end of 1996, we called around to the various churches in the area and got their count on how many had come to faith in that one year. When they were all added up, it came to 15,000 conversions to Christ in one year. The previous year we estimated only 200 believers altogether."

### **Western Europe**

A missionary in Europe reports: "Last year (1998), my wife and I started 15 new church cell groups. As we left for a six-month stateside assignment last July, we wondered what we'd find when we returned. It's wild! We can verify at least 30 churches now, but I believe that it could be two or even three times that many."

### **Ethiopia**

A missionary strategist commented, "It took us 30 years to plant four churches in this country. We've started 65 cell churches in the last nine months."

Every region of the world now pulsates with some kind of Church Planting Movement. Sometimes we see only the numbers, but often they are accompanied by lively descriptions such as this recently received e-mail message: "All of our cell churches have lay pastors/leaders because we turn over the work so fast that the missionary seldom

leads as many as two or three Bible studies before God raises at least one leader. The new leader seems to be both saved and called to lead at the same time, so we baptize him and give him a Bible. After the new believers/leaders are baptized, they are so on fire that we simply cannot hold them back. They fan out all over the country starting Bible studies, and a few weeks later we begin to get word back how many have started. It's the craziest thing we ever saw! We did not start it, and we couldn't stop it if we tried.”



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more than 500 new churches.**

Beyond the passion and excitement, many missionaries are left with questions. Most have never seen a Church Planting Movement. But the allure of an entire people group coming

to Christ is the dream of every missionary. The thought that countless thousands might be waiting to hear and respond to the gospel is a passion that fires missionary hearts and minds around the world.

So what is a Church Planting Movement? What is this phenomenon that has so captivated us? Where are these Church Planting Movements taking place? Why are they happening now? Is this something new or have they always been with us? What causes them? Are they all random events or do they share some common traits? Is there anything we can do to encourage them?

A growing number of missionaries and strategists are asking these hard questions and seeking to understand the nature of these Church Planting Movements. Hard questions are leading to helpful answers. These questions and answers are the subject of this book.

To extract these insights, we asked a number of missionaries, strategy coordinators and individuals who have had personal experience with Church Planting Movements to reflect on their shared experiences and then process them in a forum that invited critique and analysis. Through their eyes, we have attempted to isolate the key elements that make up this phenomenon as well as those impediments that prevent a Church Planting Movement from occurring. We also tasked them with providing practical steps for initiating and nurturing Church Planting Movements. The author is deeply indebted to these missionary colleagues.

The purpose of this book is to: 1) define Church Planting Movements; 2) identify their universal characteristics; 3) examine common obstacles to Church Planting Movements; 4) analyze a wide range of actual case studies; 5) provide some practical handles for beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements; and 6) address some frequently asked questions (FAQs) about Church Planting Movements.

Case studies and illustrations used in this book come from all over the world. Some have been gathered from open countries where there are few official barriers to gospel proclamation. Others originate in places where Christianity is persecuted or even forbidden. We dare not exclude these Church Planting Movements from our review, but we will need to obscure the names and places in order to protect those involved. This book is not made up of theories that we are trying to prove, nor is it a template that we forced over different kinds of situations. These are descriptions of what we have seen and learned. The principles have been deduced from actual Church Planting Movements by those involved in them. To provide as accurate a picture as possible, we'll tell you which characteristics occur frequently and which ones are unusual.

We pray that this booklet will serve as a useful resource for missionaries and evangelical friends the world over, as we all seek to understand what God is doing and how to position ourselves to be on mission with Him as He unfolds Church Planting Movements among all peoples.

## 1 WHAT IS A CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT?

In 1998, the International Mission Board's Overseas Leadership Team adopted a vision statement: We will facilitate the lost coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ by beginning and nurturing Church Planting Movements among all peoples. This vision statement guides the work of nearly 5,000 IMB missionaries serving in more than 150 countries around the world.

So, what is a Church Planting Movement? A simple, concise definition of a Church Planting Movement (CPM) is a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.

There are several key components to this definition. The first is rapid. As a movement, a Church Planting Movement occurs with rapid increases in new church starts. Saturation church planting over decades and even centuries is good, but doesn't qualify as a Church Planting Movement.



Secondly, there is an multiplicative increase. This means that the increase in churches is not simply incremental growth—adding a few churches every year or so. Instead, it compounds with two churches become four, and four churches become eight to ten, and so forth. Multiplicative growth is only possible when new churches are being started by the churches themselves—rather than by professional church planters or missionaries.

Finally, they are indigenous churches. This means they are generated from within rather than from without. This is not to say that the gospel is able to spring up intuitively within a people group. The gospel always enters a people group from the outside; this is the task of the missionary. However, in a Church Planting Movement the momentum quickly becomes indigenous so that the initiative and drive of the movement comes from within the people group rather than from outsiders.

If this definition isn't enough, we might also clarify what a Church Planting Movement is not. A Church Planting Movement is more than “evangelism that results in churches.” Evangelism that results in churches is a part of a Church Planting Movement, but the

“end-vision” is less extensive. A church planter might satisfy himself with the goal of planting a single church or even a handful of churches, but fail to see that it will take a movement of churches planting churches to reach an entire nation of people.

**A Church Planting Movement is a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.**

A Church Planting Movement is also more than a revival of pre-existing churches. Revivals are highly desirable, but they’re not Church Planting Movements. Evangelistic crusades and witnessing programs may lead thousands to Christ, and that’s wonderful, but it isn’t the same as a Church Planting Movement. Church Planting Movements feature churches rapidly reproducing themselves.



Perhaps the closest thing to a Church Planting Movement, that still is not a Church Planting Movement, is when local church planters are trained and deployed to plant multiple churches among their own people. This is a highly productive method of spreading churches across a population segment or people group, but the momentum remains in the hands of a limited group of professional church planters rather than in the heart of each new church that is begun.

Finally, a Church Planting Movement is not an end in itself. The end of all of our efforts is for God to be glorified. This occurs whenever individuals enter into right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. As they do, they are incorporated into churches which enable them to continue to grow in grace with other like-minded believers. Any time people come to new life in Jesus Christ, God is glorified. Any time a church is planted—no matter who does it—there are grounds for celebration.

So why is a Church Planting Movement so special? Because it seems to hold forth the greatest potential for the largest number of lost individuals glorifying God by coming into new life in Christ and entering into communities of faith.

However, a Church Planting Movement is not simply an increase in the number of churches, even though this also is positive. A Church Planting Movement occurs when the vision of churches planting churches spreads from the missionary and professional church planter into the churches themselves, so that by their very nature they are winning the lost and reproducing themselves.

Let's review some key points. Missionaries are capable church planters, but will always be limited in number. Local church planters hold more promise, simply because there is a larger pool of them available. Church Planting Movements hold an even greater potential, because the act of church planting is being done by the churches themselves, leading to the greatest possible number of new church starts.

To better understand Church Planting Movements, let's examine a few case studies and then dissect them for closer analysis.

## 2 CPMs UP CLOSE

International Mission Board missionaries are currently engaged in a number of Church Planting Movements and near-Church Planting Movements around the world. While each of these movements bears the influence of our missionaries, each is different as well.

Despite these differences, there are common traits that characterize almost every CPM. In the examples that follow, you will see how several IMB missionaries came to be involved in CPMs. Some were instrumental in the movement from its inception, while others arrived after the movement was well under way. In each case, there are lessons we can learn that may be transferable to other situations.

### A Latin American People Group

#### The setting

Like many other Latin American countries, this one has a mixed population of European, Hispanic and African descent. Decades of authoritarian rule have stifled economic progress and limited individual freedoms. The country is poor, but relatively well-educated compared to other countries in the region, with a literacy rate of more than 90 percent.

Traditionally, the population has been more than 95 percent Roman Catholic. For more than 25 years, however, the government attempted to suppress religious freedom. Then, in 1991, the government eased up and began to liberalize its economy and posture toward religion. Religious freedom still is not a protected right, but conditions are improving.



Baptists began missionary work in the country more than a century ago. Over the next 75 years, missionaries planted churches, trained leaders and developed a local Baptist union consisting of about 3,000 members. Following a military coup, all missionaries were

imprisoned and then expelled from the country. Along with them went half of the local Baptist membership and much of the church leadership. The next few decades threatened to eliminate the church from the country. Persecution, imprisonment and torture were widespread. During this time of opposition, the number of believers slowly increased.

### **What happened**

Due to separate American and Southern Baptist mission efforts, the Baptists in the country developed into a northern union and a southern union. Despite this separation, both unions experienced Church Planting Movements during the 1990s.

By 1989, the northern union had a membership of roughly 5,800. That same year, they began to experience an awakening as membership climbed 5.3 percent and then 6.9 percent the following year. By the end of the 1990s, the northern union's membership had grown from 5,800 to more than 14,000. Over that same period, the number of churches increased from 100 to 1,340. At last report, there is little sign of this growth slowing down. Currently, more than 38,000 regular participants in the churches are awaiting baptism.

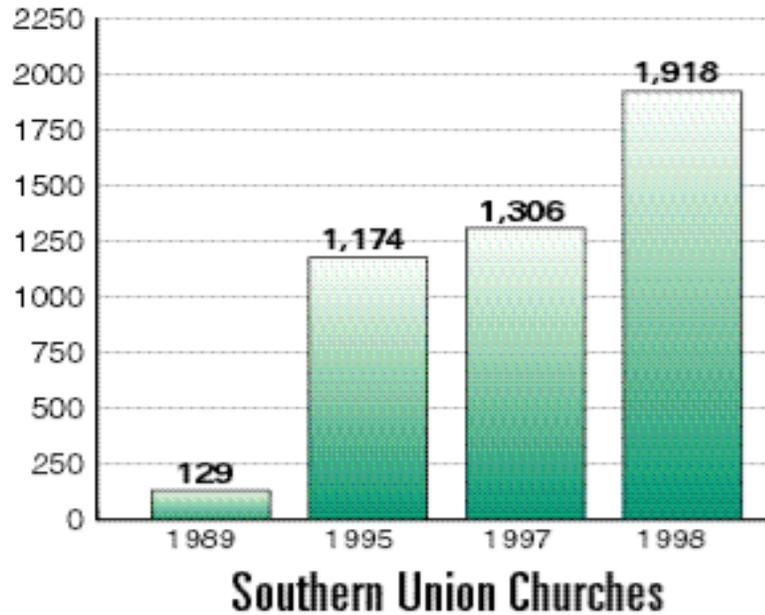
Similar developments were also unfolding in the southern union. In 1989, they had 129 churches with a membership of just under 7,000. With 533 baptisms recorded that year, they were showing signs of vitality. By 1998, their membership had risen to nearly 16,000 with annual baptisms of almost 2,000. The number of churches increased during the same period from 129 to 1,918, a remarkable 1,387 percent growth rate for the decade.

### **Key factors**

Several factors contributed to the CPM in this Latin American country. Foreign missionaries played several very strategic roles. The first came when missionaries introduced the gospel to the country for the first time. They firmly grounded the new churches on the Word of God and the priesthood of all believers. However, when a change in government forced the missionaries to leave, Christianity had a choice: Become indigenous or die. Over the next few years, the country's isolation from outside Christian contact furthered the indigenization process by minimizing the possibility of foreign funds for buildings or pastoral subsidies.

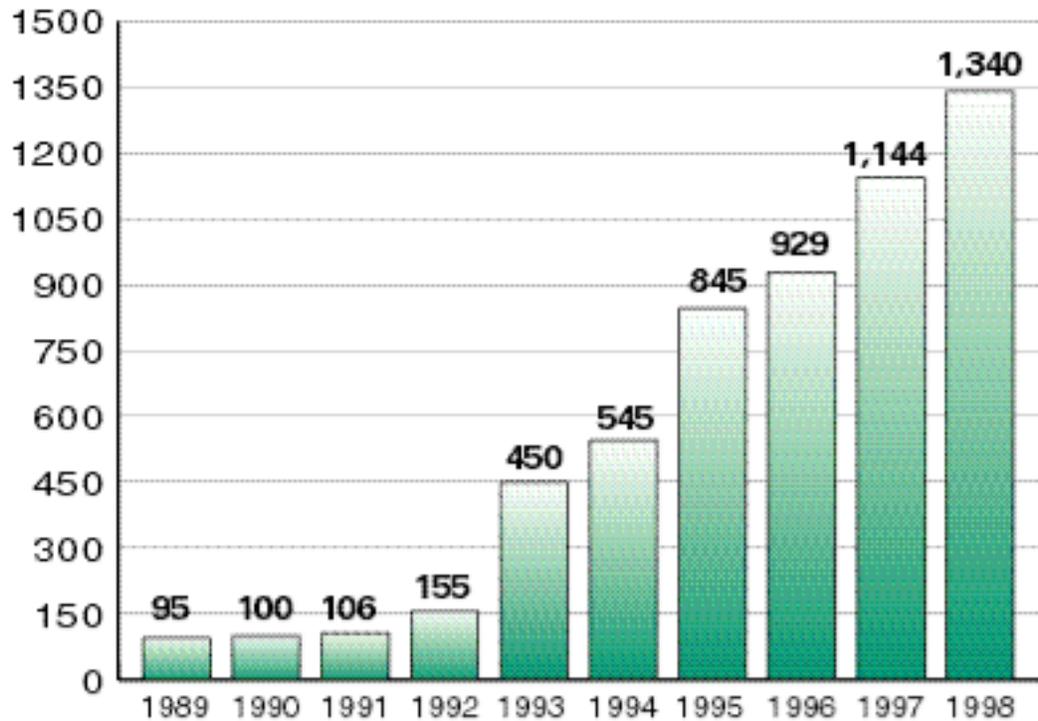
During these years of isolation, media missionaries working outside the country saturated the land with gospel radio broadcasts in the people's Spanish heart language. Missionaries and diaspora Christians also maintained a steady vigil of prayer for the believers and the lost living inside the country.

When IMB missionaries reconnected with the churches in the late 1980s, they found a Baptist faith that was deeply rooted in the nation. At this point, the missionaries made a second strategic contribution by feeding the movement through prayer, discipleship, leadership training and workshops on evangelism and cell church methodology—without creating dependency or imposing a foreign flavor on the movement.



Several other factors and characteristics contributed to the movement. From the beginning, Scripture and worship were in the heart language of the people. Undergirded by the high literacy rate, the Bible became a center of both corporate and private spiritual life.

Prayer was also a key component. Baptists in this movement described themselves as a “people on their knees.” Prayer continues to saturate their worship and daily life. They are also a people who love to sing. Worship services resound with lively hymns and songs of praise in the heart language. One church leader described music as “a form of warfare against an unbelieving world.”



## Northern Union Churches

An important challenge occurred with the severe economic crisis of 1992, which prevented church members from traveling significant distances to their church buildings for worship. Once again, the movement was at a crossroads: They could resign themselves to a churchless faith, or respond creatively to the challenge. Baptists chose the latter as they moved their meetings into homes and found that growth greatly accelerated. Once again, Baptist missionaries played a strategic role by introducing cell church models used in other parts of the world. During the first year (1992-93), the northern convention alone started 237 house churches.

Across the country, the crumbling economy and uncertain political future created an environment that was ripe for new answers and directions. It was less and less difficult or even necessary to speak to people of lostness; everything around them spoke of hopelessness and despair.

Within this turmoil, Baptist leaders urged their flock to adopt a missionary zeal for reaching their entire nation. The laity responded enthusiastically. In the mid-'90s, the northern union began a Lay Missionary School to provide a one-year training program for lay evangelists. By 1998, there were 110 graduates and 40 more enrolled. Between them, the two unions have deployed nearly 800 home missionaries across the country. In the past two years, union leaders report that "hundreds are now expressing a call to missions within their own country." The Church Planting Movement in this country is now poised to impact other nations across Latin America and throughout the world.

### **Unique factors**

Though God is clearly doing a remarkable work in this Latin American country, some shadows hover over the movement. At last report, more than 38,000 faithful participants in the churches of the northern union had not yet been baptized. A further 2,800 candidates were enrolled in baptismal classes. Why the delayed baptism of new members?

A union leader explained, “Before our country closed its doors to missionaries, churches in America assisted us in the building of six structures. Twenty years ago, one of our churches had a heated dispute over some theological matter (long since forgotten) which resulted in a split and the loss of our building. Since that time, we have learned to be cautious in allowing outsiders to become full-fledged members, lest they take our remaining buildings from us as well.”

### **Learning points**

1. The shift to house churches coincided with an enormous increase in church growth. It freed the church from physical limitations and thrust the gospel witness into the community.
2. Union leadership helped to set the direction and encourage the house-church movement, even though it meant a diminished measure of control for them.
3. Persecution weeded out those who were not serious followers of Christ. At the same time, a strong Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of the believer ensured the survival of the church when other, more hierarchical churches were crushed.
4. IMB missionaries played key roles in introducing the gospel; encouraging a CPM vision; introducing cell-church methodology and shielding the movement from dependency on foreign funds.
5. Mobilized and trained lay missionaries have been key in spreading the movement across the country.

## **A Region in China**

### **The setting**

China in the early 1990s was reeling from enormous social upheaval. Economic boom had left gross disparities between the haves and have-nots. Rapid urbanization was dismantling ancient family and communal alliances. The entire country anxiously awaited a successor to the Maoist doctrines which had held the collective mind for almost four decades.



New ideas were sweeping through the country and were viewed with a mixture of enthusiasm and rejection. The suppressed student democracy movement, culminating in the clash with government forces in Tiananmen Square in 1989, had left many youth despairing of political reform, yet still searching for some new hope for a better future.

### **What happened**

Into this setting the International Mission Board assigned a strategy coordinator in 1991 to a region we'll call Yanyin. During a year of language and culture study, the missionary conducted a thorough analysis of Yanyin. It consisted of about 7 million people clustered in five different people groups living in a variety of rural and urban settings. He mapped their population centers and began several evangelistic probes. After a few false starts, the strategy coordinator developed a reproducing model of indigenous church planting that he implemented to great effect.

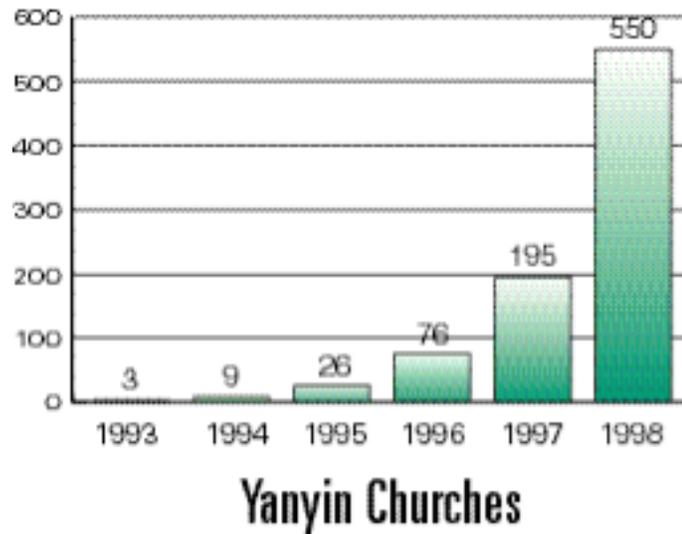
In his initial survey, the strategy coordinator found three local house churches made up of about 85 Han Chinese Christians. The membership was primarily elderly and had been slowly declining for years with no vision or prospects for growth. Over the next four years, by God's grace, the strategy coordinator helped the gospel take fresh root among this people group and sweep rapidly across the Yanyin region.

Aware of the enormous cultural and linguistic barriers that separated him from the people of Yanyin, the missionary began by mobilizing Chinese Christian co-laborers from across Asia. Then, partnering these ethnic Chinese church planters with a small team of local believers, the group planted six new churches in 1994. The following year, 17 more were begun. The next year, 50 more were started. By 1997, just three years after starting, the number of churches had risen to 195 and had spread throughout the region, taking root in each of the five people groups.

At this point the movement was spreading so rapidly that the strategy coordinator felt he could safely exit the work without diminishing its momentum. The next year, in his absence, the movement nearly tripled as the total number of churches grew to 550 with more than 55,000 believers.

## Key factors

Since his departure from the Yanyin assignment in 1997, the strategy coordinator has given considerable attention to examining the factors that enabled this Church Planting Movement to develop so rapidly. We are all the beneficiaries of this analysis, which I will relate in abbreviated form here.



As with so many assignments, the Yanyin ministry was bathed in prayer even before its inception. What began as a personal belief in the efficacy of prayer became a part of the DNA of the new Church Planting Movement as the early believers emulated the model of the missionary.

Training and structure were key elements in the initiation and rapid rise of this movement, as was the practice of “response filtering.” Response filtering is the practice of using some large-scale evangelism tool, such as video, radio or other mass outreach tools, coupled with a “feedback loop” or filtering mechanism that allows the evangelist to glean from the proclamation those who are interested in receiving further contact. In this manner, seed-sowing is almost always linked to some attempt to “draw the net” and gather inquirers into a Bible study aimed at a new church start.

Let’s take a closer look at the training and structure employed by the missionary. The strategy coordinator began with a small core of believers whom he disciplined and then trained in basic church planting methods. The missionary calls his church planting method a POUCH approach. POUCH is an acronym. P stands for participative Bible study/worship groups, describing the type of cell group meetings through which seekers are led to faith and new believers continue as church afterwards. O refers to obedience to God’s Word as the sole measure of an individual’s or church’s success. U refers to unpaid and multiple lay or bi-vocational church leaders. C stands for cell churches rarely exceeding 15 members before reproducing into new groups. H indicates homes or storefronts as the primary meeting places for these cell churches. Each of these five

characteristics contributed to the reproducibility of the churches in a manner that did not rely upon outside funding, technology or initiation.

The strategy coordinator instilled in these initial converts a vision for reaching all of Yanyin with the gospel. He shared with them his research on where the various unreached people groups of the region lived and assured them that Christ had equipped them with all they needed to reach the entire region with the gospel.

The pattern he taught for starting churches was built around four steps: 1) Model, 2) Assist, 3) Watch and 4) Leave. Modeling referred to the act of doing church with the new (or soon to be) believers using the POUCH approach described above. Assisting referred to the act of helping the newly formed church to plant a daughter church. Watching was an important and conscious effort to see to it that a third-generation church was started without the assistance or direct involvement of the missionary. Leaving was the final crucial step of ensuring that the movement was truly indigenous and self-propagating. In a very short time, the new Yanyin believers had started multiple POUCH churches across the region, each of which was modeling, assisting new church starts, watching to see that the reproduction was continuing and then leaving to go and begin a new church plant elsewhere. Undoubtedly the chain of reproduction was broken from time to time, but due to the many, many new churches that were being started, the breaks did not significantly slow the spread of the movement.

The remote region of Yanyin was far-removed from seminaries or Bible institutes. Government restrictions prohibited the building of any local seminaries. Instead, the missionary strategist looked to New Testament models of mentoring. As the missionary trained the first generation of church leaders, he insisted that they train someone else. Thus, training was done through one-on-one mentoring relationships. Each aspiring church leader was required to be both a disciple and a discipler in an ongoing chain of teaching and being taught “whatsoever things I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Whatever a lay pastor learned one day, he would teach to another lay leader the next day. This provided the ultimate example of on-the-job training that was always vital, fresh and “just in time” to be used.



### **Unique factors**

Even though persecution and death accompanied the spread of the gospel across Yanyin, there was not a systematic effort on the part of the government to stop the movement. This may have been partially due to the low profile of cell churches and the absence of new church buildings.

New believers were immediately baptized and taught that it was normal for them to win others to Christ and lead them to form new churches. This “high demand/high risk” reliance on new converts as evangelists and church planters contributed greatly to the rapid expansion of the movement.

The nondenominational context of churches in China meant that there was no denominational tradition that the churches adopted. It remains to be seen whether heretical expressions will emerge within the movement. However, the highly decentralized nature of the Yanyin Church Planting Movement is not conducive to a single individual gaining control over the whole. At the doctrinal heart of each cell church is a commitment to obey the Bible. Since church worship consists of participative Bible study with multiple leaders, there is a natural corrective from within the group itself to misinterpretation or extremes of interpretation.

When asked about the movement’s lack of denominational identity, the strategy coordinator commented that, even though the government forbids denominational expressions in China, the Yanyin churches are more Baptist than most Baptist churches he has known. He further predicts that their pattern of allegiance to the Bible and commitment to the priesthood of the laity will keep the movement on track.

### **Learning points**

1. From the beginning, evangelism was lay-led and centered among the lost rather than inside church buildings.
2. Multiple, unpaid church leaders ensured the availability of the growing number of leaders needed to continually begin new works.
3. The house-church pattern of the Yanyin movement is well-adapted to growth and to a persecution environment.

4. By leaving the assignment before it grew large enough to attract government scrutiny, the missionary helped the Yanyin movement avoid the appearance of foreignness in a country known for its nationalism and xenophobia.

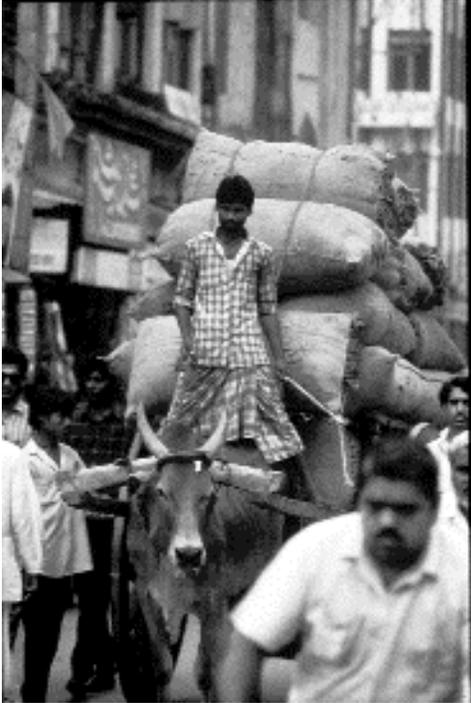
## **The Bholdari of India**

### **The setting**

In the congested interior of India there is a people group we'll call the Bholdari. The name refers to their language, which claims nearly 90 million speakers living in more than 170,000 villages stretched across four Indian states. The population includes all four castes and the classless untouchables. The majority of the people group are extremely impoverished, illiterate and dependent upon subsistence agriculture and a barter economy for their livelihood.

The region is also home to several important Hindu holy sites and the Brahmin, or priestly, caste is well-represented among the Bholdari. More than 85 percent of the Bholdari are Hindu, the remainder being Muslim or animist. Within this region there also are four large cities with more than 1 million people each.

Christian contact with these people began with the ministry of William Carey and his Baptist successors in the early 19th century. Roman Catholic Jesuits began work about the same time. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, several thousand untouchables streamed into the Catholic church. Since Indian independence in 1947, however, Catholic growth has plateaued with less than one-tenth of 1 percent professing Catholicism.



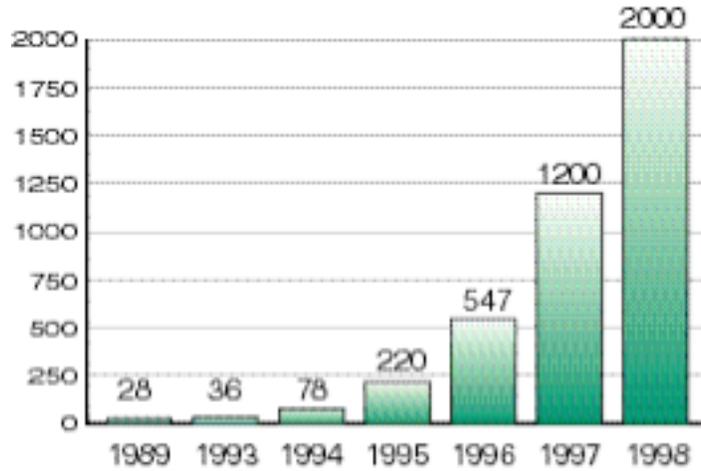
Baptist work received a spark of life from Swedish Baptist missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These missionaries succeeded in planting and nurturing 28 churches in the area before departing the field in the mid-20th century. Baptist work was dealt a severe blow when British troops, seeking to quell the nationalist independence movement, bivouacked their occupying troops in the homes of local Baptists. During the latter half of the 20th century, Christianity peaked and began a long decline. By the end of the 1980s, it had been more than 25 years since any of these churches had reproduced themselves.

### **What happened**

In 1989, Southern Baptists sent a strategy coordinator to the Bholdari people. Following a year of language and culture acquisition, the missionary launched a strategy of working through some of the local churches that had embraced his vision for planting new churches. To his horror, the first six Indian church planters, using methods common to church planting in the more tolerant environment of south India, were brutally murdered in separate events as they began their missionary work.

In 1992 the tide turned, however, as the missionary strategist implemented a new approach to church planting. Drawing on the teachings of Jesus found in Luke 10, in which Jesus sent out disciples two by two into the villages of Galilee and instructed them to find a “man of peace,” the Bholdari evangelist church planters began to do the same. Before opening his mouth to proclaim the gospel, each Bholdari missionary would move in with a local man of peace and begin discipling the family (even before they became believers) into the Christian faith using chronological storying of the Bible. As these initial converts came to faith, they led their families to the Lord, baptized them and forged them into the nucleus of new churches in each village.

In 1993, the number of churches grew from 28 to 36. The following year saw 42 more churches started. A training center ensured that there would be a continuing stream of evangelist/church planters spreading the word. Along the way, churches began multiplying themselves. In 1996, the number of churches climbed to 547, then 1,200 in 1997. By 1998 there were 2,000 churches among the Bholdari. In seven years more than 55,000 Bholdari came to faith in Jesus Christ.



**Bholdari Churches**

**Key factors**

Several key points have marked the development of this Church Planting Movement. An early one came with the missionary strategist’s decision to experiment with multiple models to determine maximum effectiveness. Simultaneous church planting initiatives were launched through the existing local Baptist churches, through a humanitarian aid project and through a local network of evangelist church planters.

After six months, the strategist carefully evaluated each work. Once he determined that the local church planters were, by far, the most productive agents, he began channeling more of his resources of time and training into them.



A second pivotal step came when the IMB strategist identified and trained an Indian missionary to serve as co-strategy coordinator from within the movement. The blond-haired American strategy coordinator with limited language acquisition would always be less suited for travel throughout the Bholdari provinces than an Indian. Together the two created a dynamic synergy. The IMB strategist lived outside of India and traveled extensively, developing a large international coalition to support the ministry. The Indian strategist lived within the region, implementing and coordinating the growing network of training, evangelism and church planting.

Just as the Indian strategist was able to do things and go places that were impossible for the IMB missionary, so too the IMB strategy coordinator was able to perform vital ministry tasks that would have been impossible for his colleague living within the country. These roles included: development of a massive global prayer ministry; creation of promotional and mobilization materials; marshaling of Scripture translation and cassettes; development of training and leadership materials; and the forging of strategic alliances with evangelicals from other parts of Asia who contributed to the expenses of the Bholdari church planters.

In an effort to minimize institutionalism and foreign dependency, the strategy coordinator has placed every program in the Bholdari ministry on a two-year timetable. After two years, funds are withdrawn and the entire work is re-evaluated. Even the church planter training programs are held in rented facilities and relocated every two years.

### **Unique factors**

What began as a predominantly Baptist movement fractured into multiple alliances during its first seven years of existence. This was due in part to the local Baptist churches' inability to keep up with the rapid growth.

Rather than divert his focus from church planting to denomination building, the strategy coordinator chose a different means of unifying the sprawling movement. The common link between every church: commitment to the Bible as undisputed authority.

Another distinctive in the Bholdari Church Planting Movement was the strategy coordinator's reliance upon outside funds to support the work. However, funding was limited in its use. Funds went to establish training centers for church planters and lay pastors, to support church planters in training and to subsidize the expenses incurred by itinerant evangelists and church planters. This provided a base of support for the church planters as they pursued their work across hostile territory. Once churches were planted, subsidies ceased. No subsidies were channeled to local pastors. Instead, pastors were trained to be bivocational. Neither was funding allowed to be channeled into constructing buildings.

The reliance upon external funds for the support of evangelist/church planters raises questions about the ability of the movement to propel itself indigenously. Avoidance of pastoral subsidies or subsidies for buildings has encouraged the indigenization process, but the funding of local missionaries has caused concern in some quarters. The response given by the strategy coordinator is that "all missionaries, by their very nature, must receive external funds. What is true for Western missionaries is true for Indian missionaries as well." An encouraging sign may be found in the way local churches have caught the vision for planting new congregations. At an annual pastors' conference each of the 1,000 pastors in attendance reported that their own churches were starting between two and five new churches.

Beginning with the family of the man of peace, conversions followed along family lines throughout each village. Individuals were not baptized apart from their household. Male family members typically baptized their emerging church family and led the church community which followed.

### **Learning points**

1. Failure can be a prelude to success, if we are willing to learn from it and not give up. The first efforts at church planting among the Bholdari resulted in six martyrs.
2. Experimentation and rigorous evaluation can help put a Church Planting Movement on track and keep it on track.
3. At the level of discipleship and doctrine, two questions have shaped the practice of the Bholdari believers. Every issue of faith and practice is met by:
  - a. what will bring honor to Christ in this situation and
  - b. what does God's word say?
4. Chronological Bible storying and oral cassette versions of the Scripture have enabled God's Word to become a central force even among a predominantly illiterate people group.

## **The Khmer of Cambodia**

### **The setting**

The 20th century has seen more than its share of wars, dictators and genocide, but few surpass the tragic modern history of Cambodia. Buffeted by the Vietnam conflict for more than two decades, Cambodia emerged from that war with Maoist dictator Pol Pot

driving the country into ruin. During his five-year reign from 1975-1979, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge engineered the murder, disappearance or starvation of up to 3.3 million of the country's 8 million citizens.



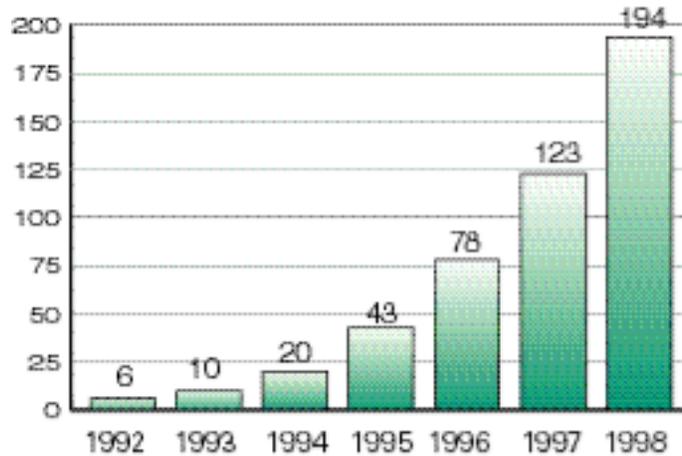
This reign of terror left Cambodia's infrastructure in shambles, its adult male population decimated and its youth illiterate. The subsequent rule by a Vietnam-installed government ended the genocide, but could not undo the damage done to Cambodian society.

The societal upheaval set the stage for the changes which were to come. Centuries of Buddhist influence were undermined by communist ideology. Roman Catholicism, which had gained a foothold in the country, was targeted by the Khmer Rouge because of perceived foreign ties to the Vatican and France. Earlier in the century, missionaries from the Christian and Missionary Alliance and Overseas Missionary Fellowship had introduced Protestantism into the country, but their numbers had never exceeded 5,000. During Pol Pot's rule, the Khmer Rouge dealt them a severe blow, expelling missionaries and murdering many of the scattered flock. By 1990, Cambodia's evangelical population had dwindled to no more than 600 believers.

### **What happened**

According to a senior missionary who served in Cambodia for decades with Overseas Missionary Fellowship, the turning point for Christianity in the country began in the 1990s. By 1999, the number of Protestant believers had risen from 600 to more than 60,000. The largest number of these were Baptists with 10,000 members, followed by an indigenous Campus Crusade denomination, then the Christian and Missionary Alliance and various other groups.

The primary catalyst for change came in December 1989, when Southern Baptists assigned a strategy coordinator to the Khmer people. By 1991, he had completed language study and already begun implementing a strategy for reaching the Khmer people.



## Cambodian Baptist Churches

Instead of planting a church himself, as had previously been his custom, the missionary began a mentoring relationship with a Cambodian layman. Within a year, he had drawn six Cambodian church planters into his mentoring circle. Over the next few months, he developed a church-planting manual in the Khmer language and taught the Khmer church planters doctrine, evangelism and church-planting skills using resources such as the JESUS film, chronological Bible storying and simple house-church development. He also instilled in them a vision and passion for reaching their entire country with a Church Planting Movement.

In 1993, the number of Baptist churches grew from six to 10. The following year, the number doubled to 20. In 1995, when the number of churches reached 43, the Cambodian church leaders formed an association of like-minded churches which they called the Khmer Baptist Convention (subsequently changed to the Cambodian Baptist Convention). The following year, the number of churches climbed to 78. In 1997, there were 123 Baptist churches scattered across 53 of the country's 117 districts. By the spring of 1999, Baptists counted more than 200 churches and 10,000 members. Few of these churches met in dedicated buildings. The vast majority met in homes that, in the countryside, could accommodate 50 or more individuals.

The strategy coordinator departed the assignment in 1996, leaving behind a small team of missionaries and a network of vital church planting churches scattered across much of the country. The work has continued to grow and strengthen.

### Key factors

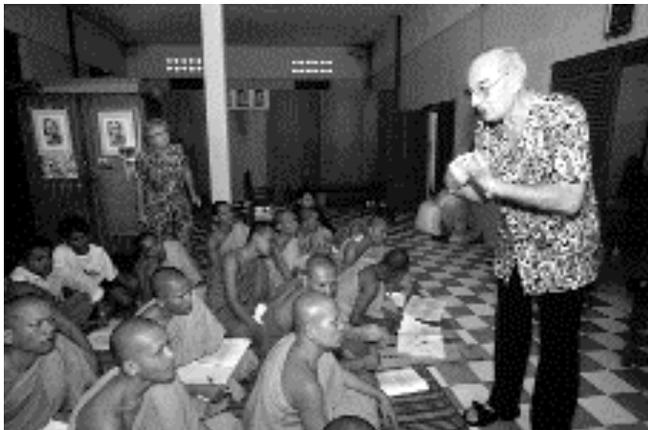
In his account of why this Church Planting Movement happened, the strategy coordinator cited several key factors. "Over the past six years," he wrote, "there has been more mobilized prayer for the people of Cambodia than any other time in their history." The missionary credits this prayer with protecting church planters and opening the hearts of lost Khmer people to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Prayer also characterizes the lives of the new church members, filling them with a strong sense of God's direct involvement in their daily affairs. Signs and wonders, such as

exorcisms, healings and other acts of spiritual warfare, continue to be commonplace among the Cambodian believers.

Training has been a fundamental element in the movement from its inception. The strategy coordinator established Rural Leadership Training Programs (RLTPs) wherever possible. These centers for church planting and theological education by extension were intensely practical. They met in facilities near the area in which they hoped to plant churches and relied upon logistical support from nearby churches. Training was offered in eight two-week modules consisting of Bible teaching, practical training in church leadership and equipping for evangelism and church planting. The 16 weeks of training generally stretched out over a two-year period of time, enabling the church leader to continue both his pastoral work and secular livelihood while gaining the much-needed training.

The strategy coordinator also insisted on modeling and mentoring as a core value of the movement. Referencing Paul's instructions in 2 Timothy 2:2, the strategy coordinator developed what he called the "222 Principle": Never do anything alone. In this manner, vision, skills, values and principles transferred from believer to believer.



As the movement unfolded, the momentum burned from within. Local leaders expressed their own vision for planting churches in every district and within each ethnic community. As they acquired training and encouragement, the primary church planters were the church members themselves, rather than missionaries or professional church planters. The coordinator later observed that “churches planted by other churches are reproducible, but those started by funded church planters are not (with few exceptions).”

In order to ensure indigenization and limit dependence on outsiders, the missionary placed time constraints on the formation of a new church. This also infused the movement with the characteristic of rapid reproduction.

With the departure of the strategy coordinator in 1996, the movement entered a new phase. The IMB missionary team that remained in the country assisted the movement by staying in a catalytic role rather than a prominent assertive role. A team member

expressed this in his admonition to his colleagues to “earnestly seek to become the low-profile footman,” and “avoid the temptation of being a high-profile frontman.”

### **Unique factors**

Though not entirely unique, it was helpful that the Cambodian Baptist Convention quickly adopted ambitious goals for their emerging association of churches. They challenged one another to spread the gospel throughout the country and plant churches in every district. This passion for evangelism and church planting affected the selection of convention leadership. Men were sought who had led in church planting themselves and had served as instructors of other church planters in the Rural Leadership Training Programs.

Within the Cambodian Baptist churches a unique model emerged, which blended New Testament substance with forms from the communist traditions. Each new church was organized around a core of seven lay leaders (see Acts 6:3, which describes the choosing of the seven deacons). The term they adopted for this seven member core was not deacons, however, but “the Central Committee.” The Central Committee directs the various outreaches to the community, including evangelism, literacy, worship, pastoral teaching and ministries to women, youth and men.

As the CPM progressed, it became evident that the Rural Leadership Training Program was essential to its growth. A missionary later observed, “Where there are RLTPs in place, church planting always follows.” With this in mind, the missionary invested himself heavily in organizing and developing training materials as well as raising support for the RLTPs from churches across Asia.

### **Learning points**

1. Shortly after the International Mission Board placed a strategy coordinator in Cambodia, more than 30 other mission agencies entered the country. None of these saw the church planting success of the IMB effort, primarily because they lacked an intentional church-planting strategy.
  2. The missionary bypassed the step of ‘passing the torch’ to the Cambodian believers by starting the movement with the torch firmly in their hands. He insisted that every church planted be planted by Cambodians.
  3. The “222 Principle” (2 Timothy 2:2) of modeling and mentoring has proven to be an invaluable means of training leaders for a Church Planting Movement.
  4. The Cambodian Baptist Convention has adopted a Church Planting Movement ethos and vision. Leaders are selected based upon their ability to contribute to this vision.
- Other Emerging Movements

As we look around the world, we see other Church Planting Movements emerging. Encouraging signs are appearing among the Maasai of Tanzania and Kenya. Their very inaccessibility on the rugged savannah lands of the Maasai Plain has limited missionary access to them. Offering to construct church buildings or subsidize pastors means little to these semi-nomadic people with their barter economy. Penetrating the forbidding terrain,

IMB missionaries have engaged the Maasai with the gospel, placing their major emphasis on training Maasai church planters and leaders.

The result has been rapid church growth among the Maasai. Worship is filled with expressions of awe and power as Maasai look to God for healing and personal direction. Chronological storying of the Bible has evolved naturally into the Maasai singing of Bible stories. Spontaneous clusters of Maasai men and women form choirs to sing the great stories of the Old and New Testament. As the Maasai accompany their songs with high vertical leaps into the air, there is little doubt that the Maasai Church Planting Movement is deeply rooted and truly indigenous.

Other Church Planting Movements are surfacing every few months: 30,000 believers in a Southeast Asian country, 100,000 believers swelling 800 new churches in eastern India; 20,000 coming to Christ over a four-year period in one Chinese province; church starts doubling in six months in one Western European country; 383 churches starting in a single state in Brazil.

Missionaries are sharing these reports with each other—and telling one another the means by which God is doing these marvelous works. God is doing something remarkable. Let's take a look at what we've learned from these mighty works of God around the world.

### **3 TEN UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS**

After surveying Church Planting Movements around the world, we found at least 10 elements present in every one of them. While it may be possible to have a Church Planting Movement without them, we have yet to see this occur. Any missionary intent on seeing a Church Planting Movement should consider these 10 elements.

#### **1. Prayer**

Prayer has been fundamental to every Church Planting Movement we have observed. Prayer typically provides the first pillar in a strategy coordinator's master plan for reaching his or her people group. However, it is the vitality of prayer in the missionary's personal life that leads to its imitation in the life of the new church and its leaders. By revealing from the beginning the source of his power in prayer, the missionary effectively gives away the greatest resource he brings to the assignment. This sharing of the power source is critical to the transfer of vision and momentum from the missionary to the new local Christian leadership.

#### **2. Abundant gospel sowing**

We have yet to see a Church Planting Movement emerge where evangelism is rare or absent. Every Church Planting Movement is accompanied by abundant sowing of the gospel. The law of the harvest applies well: "If you sow abundantly you will also reap abundantly." In Church Planting Movements, hundreds and even thousands of individuals are hearing the claims that Jesus Christ has on their lives. This sowing often relies heavily upon mass media evangelism, but it always includes personal evangelism with vivid testimonies to the life-changing power of the gospel.

The converse to the law of the harvest is also true. Wherever governments or societal forces have managed to intimidate and stifle Christian witness, Church Planting Movements have been effectively eliminated.

#### **3. Intentional church planting**

In every Church Planting Movement, someone implemented a strategy of deliberate church planting before the movement got under way. There are several instances in which all the contextual elements were in place, but the missionaries lacked either the skill or the vision to lead a Church Planting Movement. However, once this ingredient was added to the mix, the results were remarkable.

Churches don't just happen. There is evidence around the world of many thousands coming to Christ through a variety of means without the resulting development of multiple churches. In these situations, an intentional church-planting strategy might transform these evangelistic awakenings into full-blown Church Planting Movements.

#### **4. Scriptural authority**

Even among nonliterate people groups, the Bible has been the guiding source for doctrine, church polity and life itself. While Church Planting Movements have occurred

among peoples without the Bible translated into their own language, the majority had the Bible either orally or in written form in their heart language. In every instance, Scripture provided the rudder for the church's life, and its authority was unquestioned.

### **5. Local leadership**

Missionaries involved in Church Planting Movements often speak of the self-discipline required to mentor church planters rather than do the job of church planting themselves. Once a missionary has established his identity as the primary church planter or pastor, it's difficult for him ever to assume a back-seat profile again. This is not to say that missionaries have no role in church planting. On the contrary, local church planters receive their best training by watching how the missionary models participative Bible studies with non-Christian seekers. Walking alongside local church planters is the first step in cultivating and establishing local leadership.

### **6. Lay leadership**

Church Planting Movements are driven by lay leaders. These lay leaders are typically bivocational and come from the general profile of the people group being reached. In other words, if the people group is primarily nonliterate, then the leadership shares this characteristic. If the people are primarily fishermen, so too are their lay leaders. As the movement unfolds, paid clergy often emerge. However, the majority—and growth edge of the movement—continue to be led by lay or bi-vocational leaders.

This reliance upon lay leadership ensures the largest possible pool of potential church planters and cell church leaders. Dependence upon seminary-trained—or in nonliterate societies, even educated—pastoral leaders means that the work will always face a leadership deficit.

### **7. Cell or house churches**

Church buildings do appear in Church Planting Movements. However, the vast majority of the churches continue to be small, reproducible cell churches of 10-30 members meeting in homes or storefronts.

There is a distinction between cell churches and house churches. Cell churches are linked to one another in some type of structured network. Often this network is linked to a larger, single church identity. The Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, South Korea, is perhaps the most famous example of the cell-church model with more than 50,000 individual cells.

House churches may look the same as cell churches, but they generally are not organized under a single authority or hierarchy of authorities. As autonomous units, house churches may lack the unifying structure of cell churches, but they are typically more dynamic. Each has its advantages. Cell groups are easier to shape and guide toward doctrinal conformity, while house churches are less vulnerable to suppression by a hostile government. Both types of churches are common in Church Planting Movements, often appearing in the same movement.

### **8. Churches planting churches**

In most Church Planting Movements, the first churches were planted by missionaries or by missionary-trained church planters. At some point, however, as the movements entered a multiplicative phase of reproduction, the churches themselves began planting new churches. In order for this to occur, church members have to believe that reproduction is natural and that no external aids are needed to start a new church. In Church Planting Movements, nothing deters the local believers from winning the lost and planting new cell churches themselves.

### **9. Rapid reproduction**

Some have challenged the necessity of rapid reproduction for the life of the Church Planting Movement, but no one has questioned its evidence in every CPM. Most church planters involved in these movements contend that rapid reproduction is vital to the movement itself. They report that when reproduction rates slow down, the Church Planting Movement falters. Rapid reproduction communicates the urgency and importance of coming to faith in Christ. When rapid reproduction is taking place, you can be assured that the churches are unencumbered by nonessential elements and the laity are fully empowered to participate in this work of God.

### **10. Healthy churches**

Church growth experts have written extensively in recent years about the marks of a church. Most agree that healthy churches should carry out the following five purposes: 1) worship, 2) evangelistic and missionary outreach, 3) education and discipleship, 4) ministry and 5) fellowship. In each of the Church Planting Movements we studied, these five core functions were evident.

A number of church planters have pointed out that when these five health indicators are strong, the church can't help but grow. More could be said about each of these healthy church indicators, but the most significant one, from a missionary vantage point, is the church's missionary outreach. This impulse within these CPM-oriented churches is extending the gospel into remote people groups and overcoming barriers that have long resisted Western missionary efforts.

## **4 TEN COMMON FACTORS**

Beyond the 10 universal elements found in every Church Planting Movement, there are at least 10 frequently, though not universally, found characteristics. These are not listed in any particular order of priority or frequency. In most CPMs, however, we are seeing most if not all of these factors.

### **1. Worship in the heart language**

There are cases in which God's Word has not yet been translated into the heart language of the people and worship is conducted in a trade language. Even in those rare instances, though, the heart language of the people emerges in their prayers, songs, sermon illustrations and applications. Worship in the common heart language keeps it accessible and within reach of all members of the community and allows everyone to participate in a new church's formation. Missionaries who identify and embrace the heart language of the people they are trying to reach are well positioned to stimulate a Church Planting Movement. Nothing reveals a people group's worldview as much as an intimate knowledge of their heart language. Missionaries who choose to work through a trade language begin their ministry with a curtain between themselves and the hearts of the people they are seeking to reach.

### **2. Evangelism has communal implications**

Unlike the predominant pattern in the West with its emphasis on individualism and personal commitment, Church Planting Movements typically rely on a much stronger family and social connection. Missionaries in CPMs have recognized this and urged new believers to follow the web of their own family relationships to draw new believers into the community of faith (see Acts 16:31-32). In many cases, the churches come to consist of family units and are led by the family's head.

### **3. Rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church**

In most Church Planting Movements, baptism is not delayed by lengthy discipleship requirements. On the contrary, discipleship typically precedes conversion and continues indefinitely. Even when baptisms are delayed, new believers are expected to become witnesses immediately; these new disciples immediately become disciplers of others and even church planters. One elderly man who came to Christ in a Church Planting Movement in India planted 42 churches in his first year as a believer. In an effort to keep the movement growing outward, CPM-oriented missionaries typically encourage new believers to join or help start new churches, rather than simply adding larger numbers to existing congregations.

### **4. Passion and fearlessness**

Church planting movements are characterized by passion and a sense of urgency that attests to the importance of salvation and the necessity of conversion. New believers exhibit a boldness in the face of opposition. A spirit of timidity or fear quenches a CPM. Boldness may invite persecution, but it fuels a Church Planting Movement (see Joshua 1:6).



### **5. A price to pay to become a Christian**

Church Planting Movements often emerge in difficult settings where conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a popular or socially advantageous thing to do. In many cases, conversion leads to severe persecution or even death. In the face of this persecution, believers find strong support in the testimony of Jesus and the New Testament church (see Matt. 10:17-25). Persecution tends to screen out the uncommitted and ensures a highly dedicated membership.

### **6. Perceived leadership crisis or spiritual vacuum in society**

A country or people group that has experienced a loss of leadership or a spiritual void coming from war, natural disaster or displacement may create a ripe environment for a Church Planting Movement. Societal disintegration is becoming increasingly common in our rapidly changing world and bodes well for Church Planting Movements. The removal of long-held symbols of stability and security prompts individuals to reconsider matters of eternal significance.

### **7. On-the-job training for church leadership**

With the rapid increase in the number of churches, effective leadership training is critical to the success of the movement. If new church leaders have to leave their churches for extended periods for theological training, the momentum of the movement will be diminished. At the same time, this vital component of church growth must not be overlooked. The most beneficial training brings education as close to the action as possible. Theological Education by Extension, with an emphasis on practical learning interspersed with ongoing ministry, has proven to be a strong complement to Church Planting Movements.

The forms of this on-the-job training vary from field to field, but typically include a series of short-term training modules that do not impede the primary tasks of evangelism, church planting and pastoral leadership. Missionaries also attest to the importance of ongoing leadership training for the continued growth and strong development of a Church Planting Movement.

#### **8. Leadership authority is decentralized**

Denominations and church structures that impose a hierarchy of authority or require bureaucratic decision-making are ill-suited to handle the dynamism of a Church Planting Movement. It is important that every cell or house church leader has all the authority required to do whatever needs to be done in terms of evangelism, ministry and new church planting without seeking approval from a church hierarchy.

### **Denominations and church structures that impose a hierarchy of authority or require bureaucratic decision-making are ill-suited to handle the dynamism of a Church Planting Movement.**

#### **9. Outsiders keep a low profile**

Missionaries who have been involved in Church Planting Movements point to the importance of keeping a low personal profile as they seek to initiate and nurture the movement. A key concern is to minimize foreignness and encourage indigeneity. Rather than waiting for new believers to prove themselves worthy of leadership, missionaries begin by drawing new believers into leadership roles through participative Bible studies and mentoring pastors from behind the scenes.

#### **10. Missionaries suffer**

A list of missionaries who have been engaged in Church Planting Movements reads like a catalog of calamity. Many have suffered illness, derision and shame. In some instances the suffering was due to their own self-destructive behavior; in other cases it came at the hands of opponents. Students of Church Planting Movements suggest that the affliction may be related to a higher spiritual price required for rolling back the darkness (Rev. 12:12). Whatever the cause, the disproportionate degree of suffering by missionaries engaged in Church Planting Movements is noteworthy. Missionaries intent on this course of action are well-advised to be on their guard, to watch, fight and pray.

## 5 TEN PRACTICAL HANDLES

Church Planting Movements are sovereign acts of God, but in His sovereign grace and mercy He has chosen to partner with us. There are some practical things that missionaries can do to help initiate or nurture a Church Planting Movement. These are not sequential steps. Some of them are more important than others, but each of them has been used in the formation of Church Planting Movements somewhere in the world. Each missionary must determine which ones fit his or her situation and how best to adapt them for maximum benefit.

### **1. Pursue a CPM orientation from the beginning**

This is a key point: Church Planting Movements begin the day the work begins. The end-vision is being "realized" from the beginning. Thus, missionaries who want to start a Church Planting Movement must begin by "modeling a CPM-type church" complete with evangelism, discipleship and multiplication training within a cell-group setting. This defies the sequential model that begins with pre-evangelism, then evangelism, then discipleship, church planting, missions, etc.

### **2. Develop and implement comprehensive strategies**

Missionaries who address the scope of all that is required for initiating and nurturing a Church Planting Movement quickly realize that the job is far beyond their personal limitations of time, talent and resources. However, as they look to the broader resource pool of Great Commission Christians and continually ask the question, "What's it going to take to launch a Church Planting Movement?" they find that a comprehensive strategy is required.

A comprehensive strategy stands on at least four pillars: 1) prayer, 2) God's Word, 3) evangelism and 4) church planting. These four pillars are complemented by a matrix of ministries including human needs ministries, communications strategies, mobilization and other efforts. When combined, these comprehensive strategies free the ministry from the limitations of a single missionary or even a single mission agency and maximize the possibilities for initiating and nurturing a Church Planting Movement.

**The effective strategy coordinator is  
ruthless in evaluating all he or she does in  
light of the end-vision—a Church Planting  
Movement—discarding those  
things that do not or will not lead to it.**

### **3. Evaluate everything to achieve the end-vision**

A missionary once commented, "You can tell a good strategy coordinator from a bad one by what he says 'no' to." This should not be interpreted to mean that widespread experimentation is inappropriate, but the effective strategy coordinator is ruthless in evaluating all he or she does in light of the end-vision—a Church Planting Movement—discarding those things that do not or will not lead to it.

#### **4. Employ precision harvesting**

Rather than randomly sowing gospel seeds and awaiting a harvest, a growing number of missionaries have learned the wisdom of precision harvesting. Precision harvesting uses “response filtering” to identify and locate individuals who have already made a positive response to the gospel and then places longer-term workers in direct contact with them for discipleship follow-up and church planting. This model recognizes that a missionary who settles onto the mission field may succeed in learning the language, sharing his faith, discipling a group of believers and planting a church, but that there may be a more efficient way to accomplish the same end.

Working with radio broadcasters or other agents of mass evangelism, the missionary church planter is able to glean the names and addresses of respondents to another’s sowing ministry. Then, positioning himself in the midst of these new believers or seekers, he is able to begin a discipling and church planting ministry. This ministry of precision harvesting can save years in the process of starting a church or multiple churches.

#### **5. Prepare new believers for persecution**

New believers must understand that a call to Christ is a call to the cross. Harassment, persecution and even martyrdom may come, but they should not be a surprise to new believers. Since New Testament times, persecution has come to those who follow Christ. Preparation for harassment doesn’t wait until after conversion; it begins in the evangelization process itself. Believers are taught to expect hardships from the beginning as the price of their conversion (see Mark 8:34).

#### **6. Gather them, then win them**

A logical progression in church planting is: Win them, disciple them, congregationalize them, then organize them into a church. But this isn’t the only way to get the job done. Many effective church planters who have participated in Church Planting Movements have learned to gather a group of lost seekers into evangelistic worship and Bible study groups. These “not-yet Christians” are brought into the vision for a Church Planting Movement even as they are brought into the family of faith.

#### **7. Try a POUCH methodology**

The POUCH methodology, described in the case study of the Yanyin people, contains core elements that should be applicable in virtually any church planting context. A POUCH church utilizes Participative Bible study and worship groups, affirms Obedience to the Bible as the sole measure of success, uses Unpaid and non-hierarchical leadership and meets in Cell groups or House churches.

#### **8. Develop multiple leaders within each cell church**

Avoid the trap of inadequate leadership required to meet growth needs by starting the work with multiple leaders. Remember the Cambodia Church Planting Movement, which began every new cell church with a seven-person “Central Committee”? This type of multiple leadership is common in Church Planting Movements and ensures an abundance of potential leaders for the cell church itself and for starting new churches.

### **9. Use on-the-job training**

Avoid the temptation to pull new local church leaders away from their churches for years of training in an institution. A decentralized theological education which is punctuated by practical experience is preferable. This approach might include one month of training with two months of pastoral work, or eight sessions of training for two weeks at a time stretched over a couple of years, with ongoing discipleship and skill upgrades that may last a lifetime. Higher education may benefit church leaders at some point, but it can hinder a Church Planting Movement in its early stages.

### **10. Model, Assist, Watch & Leave (MAWL)**

Missionaries who are competent church planters face as much challenge from themselves as they do from the people group they are trying to reach. There is always a temptation to “do it myself” rather than turn the work over to the emerging local leadership. This transfer of responsibilities is complicated by the fact that many, if not most, missionaries enjoy pastoring and ministering to people.

This crisis of transferring responsibility can be minimized when the missionary shares responsibility from the beginning with those he is leading. A church-planting pattern of modeling new church planting and worship, then assisting the church members in the process of doing the same themselves, helps to pass on the missionary’s expertise to the next generation of local church planters (see 2 Tim. 2:2).

Only when the missionary has actually stepped away from the work is the cycle of MAWL completed. Only then is a passionate renewal of indigenous church planting assured.

## 6 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As we discuss Church Planting Movements with missionaries from around the world, a number of questions frequently recur.

### 1. What about volunteers?

The key to effective use of volunteers in missions is orientation. Most short-term volunteers want to be strategic, but don't realize that some forms of help can actually hinder a Church Planting Movement. Constructing church buildings, subsidizing pastors and creating dependency are well-intentioned obstacles to a Church Planting Movement.



Prayerwalks, evangelism, literature distribution, pastoral mentoring and human needs ministry are some of the many positive contributions that volunteers make. Volunteers also provide invaluable support to long-term missionaries who suffer from isolation, difficulties in language learning, culture stress, family hardships, etc.

One of the greatest contributions volunteers provide is vision and passion. They inspire and encourage missionaries and new believers alike with their demonstration of faith in traveling great distances to demonstrate their love for the lost and obedience to the Great Commission. This love and obedience are contagious.

### 2. What is the place of Baptist unions and conventions?

Baptist unions and conventions hold great potential as partners in fulfilling the Great Commission. Sharing a common commitment to Christ, they should be natural allies. However, commitment to initiating and nurturing a Church Planting Movement requires vision. When union leaders have a vision for church multiplication that exceeds their need for control, they can greatly facilitate the movement. Missionaries can help to impart this vision through dialogue, education and modeling.

It is also important for missionaries to recognize that their role is different than that of denominational leaders. The unique role of the missionary is to continually push to the edge of lostness, to the unreached, and introduce them to the gospel. Denominational leaders have a much broader responsibility, which the missionaries can bless and encourage, but should not try to duplicate or control.

### **3. How about church buildings and institutions?**

Church buildings and institutions can contribute to Church Planting Movements, but they also can become stumbling blocks. When buildings and institutions emerge indigenously and naturally within the needs and means of the local believers, they undergird the work. When institutions (seminaries, schools, hospitals, etc.) are imposed by or dependent upon external agents, they may leave a burden of maintenance that distracts from the momentum of evangelism and church planting.

Church buildings have become second nature to us in the West. We forget that it took Christianity nearly three centuries before it indigenously arrived at the need for dedicated church buildings. During those same three centuries the gospel exploded across much of the known world. When we instantly provide church buildings for new congregations, we may be saddling them with an external burden they are ill-equipped to carry.

## **Church buildings and institutions can contribute to Church Planting Movements, but they also can become stumbling blocks.**

### **4. Where do teams fit in?**

Like everything else we've discussed, teams are not inherently for or against Church Planting Movements. If each team member sees the purpose of the team as fostering and nurturing a Church Planting Movement, then the prospects for success are good. If, on the other hand, the team or its members turn inward and become an end in themselves, then a Church Planting Movement is unlikely. When people group-focused teams die to themselves, and set their sights on doing whatever it takes under the lordship of Jesus Christ to initiate and nurture a Church Planting Movement, success cannot be far away.

### **5. Do Church Planting Movements foster heresy?**

Critics contend that a grassroots phenomenon such as a Church Planting Movement is fertile ground for heresy. This may be true, but is not necessarily so. The often-proposed solution is more theological training. However, church history has shown that the cure can be worse than the disease. Since the first theological school at Alexandria, Egypt, seminaries have proven themselves capable of transmitting heresy as well as sound doctrine. The same is true today.

The key to sound doctrine is God's Word. In the explosive church growth environment of the first century, there were no seminaries, simply a practice of "teaching them to observe whatsoever things I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Out of this mandate grew a number of approaches to discipleship and training. The challenge of the first century has changed little for us today and invites the same types of creative responses to ensure a continued faithfulness to Christ's teachings.

### **6. What do you do with the kids?**

Missionaries and those with traditional church experience have raised many questions about the mechanics of cell-church methodology. One of the most common questions concerns the place of children in cell churches. Cell church practitioners admit that this is a weakness compared to traditional churches with their graded Sunday School programs. Solutions range from incorporating the children into the cell church Bible study and worship to segregating them into separate programs that may be led by rotating

volunteers or older youth. If we resist the temptation to let cell churches get too large before they divide and multiply, we keep the task of nurturing and discipling our youth more manageable.

While there are no universal answers to this challenge, there are a variety of responses that are surfacing around the world. As with so many challenges related to a Church Planting Movement, missionaries and church planters are encouraged to continue to experiment, innovate and adapt!

#### **7. Can we start again please?**

Some missionaries who begin to seriously study Church Planting Movements occasionally find that they are simply off-track and wonder if it is possible to begin again. Of course it's impossible to actually begin again, but it is possible to correct earlier mistakes and tip the scales of a movement in the right direction. Because Church Planting Movements aren't just sequential, step-by-step programs, they can be facilitated whenever we stop doing those things that impede them and begin doing more of those things that seem to support them. This should be an encouragement to anyone who hopes to see a CPM unfold among a people group.

## 7 OBSTACLES TO CPMs

Church Planting Movements are acts of God, but it's amazing how much mankind is capable of interfering with them. As with most of God's works among us, He allows us to actively cooperate with Him or become obstacles—consciously or unconsciously—to His desired purposes. Missionaries involved in Church Planting Movements have identified several very human courses of action that tend to obstruct, slow or otherwise hinder CPMs. Even though we cannot create a Church Planting Movement, we can certainly work to avoid blocking their emergence. Here are some of the most prominent obstacles to Church Planting Movements facing missionaries today.

### 1. Imposing extra-biblical requirements for being a church

When a mission, union or convention attempts to require a congregation to have extra-biblical things such as land, a building, seminary-trained leadership or paid clergy before granting them full status as a church, a Church Planting Movement is obstructed. Christians may have the best of intentions when they impose preconditions before officially constituting a church—preconditions usually aimed at ensuring viability of the church before leaving it to its own devices. However, requirements such as building, property and salaried clergy quickly can become millstones around the neck of the church and make reproducing itself all the more unlikely.

### 2. Loss of a valued cultural identity

When a people have to abandon their valued ethnic identity and adopt an alien culture in order to become believers, the cause of church planting won't go far. Around the world, many churches that look culturally out of place in their setting serve as testimonies to this obstacle.

In too many instances, church planting has become cultural warfare, as missionaries and local Christians attempt to conquer and change the culture rather than the hearts of the people. Whenever one must become like a Russian, American, European, etc., to become a Christian, there is little chance that the movement will spread rapidly among a non-Russian, non-American or non-European people.

### 3. Overcoming bad examples of Christianity

Unfortunately, the spread of the gospel around the world has sometimes produced churches that are poor examples of the faith. If older churches in an area have non-regenerate members who engage in worldly and immoral behavior, it will be difficult for new believers to convince the lost that the Christian faith is holy and capable of redeeming their world.

Some patterns of church behavior may not be immoral, but still compromise and undermine the spirit of a Church Planting Movement. Whenever older churches in the area feel no compulsion to spread their faith, new believers may question why they should be passionate or urgent in evangelism.

### 4. Non-reproducible church models

Whenever missionaries begin planting churches with components that cannot be reproduced by the people themselves, they have undermined a Church Planting Movement. The temptation is always there: it seems quicker and easier to import a solution for a local challenge rather than search for an indigenous solution. Extraneous items may be as innocuous as cinderblocks for construction, electronic sound systems or imported folding chairs.

Authentic Church Planting Movements always take on the appearance of their context. If villages are made of bamboo, then church buildings are made of bamboo. In urban areas, cell or house churches emulate family structures instead of a congregational structure that requires expensive buildings used exclusively for worship meetings. CPM practitioners evaluate every aspect of each church start with the question: "Can this be

reproduced by these believers?” If the answer is “no,” then the foreign element is discarded.

### **5. Subsidies creating dependency**

Money is not inherently evil. It has a vital role to play in the support of missionaries and promotion of things lost people or new believers cannot do for themselves. Any time the gospel is introduced to a new people group, external support is required. The problem is when outside funding creates dependency among new Christians, stifling their initiative and quenching a Church Planting Movement.

Proper use of external funds might include financing outreach to an unreached people, development of gospel literature, radio programming and broadcasts, production of the JESUS film, Scripture translation, gospel television, cassettes, CDs, etc. When well-intentioned outsiders prop up growth by purchasing buildings or subsidizing pastors’ salaries, they limit the capacity of the movement to reproduce itself spontaneously and indigenously.

### **6. Extra-biblical leadership requirements**

Whenever well-intentioned missionaries, churches or denominational leaders impose requirements for church leaders that exceed those stipulated by the New Testament, a Church Planting Movement is impeded.

New Testament models are found in Christ’s selection of the twelve disciples (Matt. 4:18-22) and Paul’s criteria for bishops and deacons (1 Timothy 3). It is striking that moral character and willingness to follow Christ are given much greater weight than theological training or academic degrees.

### **7. Linear, sequential thought and practice**

It is natural for missionaries to think in terms of sequential steps in church planting. For example, first you learn the language, then you develop relationships, then you share a witness, then you disciple believers, then you congregationalize, then you raise up leaders, then you begin another church start, etc. However, missionaries who have successfully navigated Church Planting Movements describe a different, nonlinear unfolding of the movement.

They insist on the importance of witnessing from day one, even before the language is mastered. Rather than waiting for conversion, missionaries disciple the lost into conversion. By the time they’ve become believers, the new converts already have been participating in cell churches for some time and already have acquired a vision for starting churches! Church Planting Movements occur when all of the various elements of a Church Planting Movement are under way simultaneously.

### **8. Planting “frog” rather than “lizard” churches**

Yes, this is a metaphor. Frog churches perceive themselves as ends in themselves, sitting fat and complacent on a hill or lily pad (or main street), expecting the lost to come to them in search of salvation. Frog churches hold meetings in places where they feel comfortable and require the lost to adapt to their froggy world. Lizard churches are always pursuing the lost. Adaptable and ready for action, they move quickly into the world through cracks and crevices seeking the lost. Lizard churches penetrate the homes of the lost with evangelistic Bible studies rather than requiring the lost to come to their churches. They are willing to change their colors, expend enormous energy, even lose their tails if necessary in order to bring the lost into the family of God.

### **9. Prescriptive strategies**

After all the instruction that has gone into this book, it may seem strange to warn missionaries against prefabricated methodologies. However, Church Planting Movement practitioners are intensely inquisitive and committed to learning where and how God is at work. Whenever missionaries enter a field with a pocket full of answers rather than a heart that is hungry to watch and learn where God is at work and what He is doing, they

are limiting His ability to use them. This is not to encourage a “know-nothing” approach to missions, but it does speak to the necessity of humility and dependence upon God to reveal where and how He chooses to bring about a Church Planting Movement.

## 8 TIPS FOR FINE-TUNING A CPM

Alongside the models of Church Planting Movements we have examined, many others could be described as near misses. A number of these show many of the characteristics we've come to identify with Church Planting Movements, but lack some essential components and thus may result in aborted movements.

An example of this is a Turkic Muslim people who have been turning to Christ by the tens of thousands over the past five years. As recently as 1992 there were no more than 50 known believers among this population of several million. Beginning in 1989, a strategy built on prayer, evangelism and ministry was initiated among them. Work was slow at first, but in late 1995 the turn to Christ began. By the end of the following year, local churches in the area reported baptizing more than 15,000 of these Turkic Muslims.



Today, the swell of new believers has subsided somewhat, but still features somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 adult converts. The troubling factor is the relative lack of new churches to assimilate the growth. While convert growth has exploded, there has been little increase in the number of church starts, threatening to leave thousands of churchless orphans to fend for themselves.

Perhaps it is not too late for missionaries to implement a strategy of planting indigenously reproducing cell or house churches among this people group. Training lay believers to plant new cell churches could redeem this movement.

A similar situation has taken place among a Muslim people group in Africa. As a result of widespread gospel radio broadcast and video evangelism, conservative reports estimate more than 15,000 Muslim converts to Christianity. Despite these encouraging numbers, only 30 known churches exist in the region. Unless a more effective and indigenously reproducible model of church can be introduced, there will likely be a great loss of new believers.



More common types of “near misses” are the many places around the world where missionaries have experienced moderate growth when much greater growth may be possible. In these instances, missionaries have been faithfully evangelizing and planting churches among their people group for decades. People are responding to the gospel and the kingdom is slowly growing. While church growth is steady, it is far from explosive. No one would confuse this with a Church Planting Movement. In this pattern of incremental church growth, church starts are not even able to keep pace with the population growth rate.

Are Church Planting Movements possible in these kinds of settings? Only God can say for sure, but CPM practitioners suggest that some fine-tuning steps might be taken that could help tip the scales in favor of a Church Planting Movement. In some cases, the gestation period for church starts is just too lengthy. In these instances, it may be possible to shorten the reproductive cycle of a church plant. Here are some tips that may help to speed the process:

If you’re using chronological storying to communicate the gospel, remember that storying is a method, not an end in itself. As a method, it can be adapted and modified. Consider using five to 10 stories to provide a panorama overview of the Bible leading to a gospel presentation and a call to commitment. You can then follow up the panorama presentation with a lengthier walk through the Bible aimed at discipleship and additional presentations of the gospel.

You might also try shortening the chronological storying approach. Some storiers spend as much as 110 weeks working through the Bible from creation to the consummation of the ages. Could this be reduced either by choosing fewer stories or by offering the stories more frequently? Perhaps both methods could be implemented. This might reduce the time required for a church start from two years to a few weeks!

In the same manner, consider compressing a 12-week evangelistic Bible study into a 12-night Bible study. You get the picture. Remember, speed of reproduction is one of the universal characteristics of a Church Planting Movement. Resist the assumption that greater speed equals diminished quality. The notion that slower is better isn’t necessarily true.

You also can accelerate church planting by raising the expectations and church-planting responsibilities of new believers. In a Church Planting Movement, discipleship and leadership development are ongoing processes rather than stages in a linear progression that individuals must pass through before they can begin planting churches themselves. Remember, in a Church Planting Movement in India, one new believer planted 42 churches in a single year. No one told him he was too spiritually immature for such behavior!

Finally, some missionaries may find themselves in a situation that does not appear to have any of the elements that indicate potential for a Church Planting Movement. What do you do then?

Many of those factors that contribute to—or hinder—a Church Planting Movement take years to develop or change. Like a toy boat floating on a pond, if we gradually stack pebbles on top of it, one by one, the weight will eventually become too much and the vessel will submerge. So it is with Church Planting Movements. Working steadily to add elements that contribute to a Church Planting Movement and removing known obstacles may someday result in a critical mass that transforms the situation from a hard, dry, unproductive field into a dynamic Church Planting Movement.

The beginning point for this change is a spiritual renewal, a passionate desire in the heart of every missionary to see all the peoples of the world come to saving faith. Only when our vision is revived and we hunger for a Church Planting Movement are we willing to take any and every action necessary to pursue this goal.

## 9 A CPM VISION FOR THE WORLD

God has shown us that He is indeed doing something in our days among the peoples of the earth—something so amazing we would not have believed it had we not seen it with our own eyes (see Hab. 1:5). We are calling this amazing thing Church Planting Movements. Church Planting Movements are not limited to a geographical or racial sector of society. God has demonstrated that He can produce them among urban or rural, educated or illiterate people on any continent and from any religious background. The universal link in each of them is God reconciling the world to Himself through Christ Jesus.

Along the way, He has called us to be co-laborers with Him. If we are willing, He may grace us further to see Church Planting Movements unfold throughout the world in our generation.

Over the past five years, in as few as five Church Planting Movements, nearly a quarter of a million lost souls have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Imagine 50 Church Planting Movements—or 500! The excitement, however, is not in the numbers, not even when we consider that these numbers represent individuals coming to new life in Christ. The greatest joy comes in being on mission with God in His redemptive plan for the nations—serving as His instruments in this unfolding miracle of salvation that is being extended to all peoples. It is for this joy that we press on.

Marathon runners usually begin their race with great enthusiasm. Before long, however, many drop out or slow down. But some runners stride on through the pain and exhaustion. For these enduring athletes, there is no more exhilarating sight than the homestretch. When they see it, their pulse quickens, their pace strengthens and their adrenaline surges as they drive themselves forward to the finish line.

The body of Christ has been running a great race for nearly 2,000 years. Along the way, many believers have grown weary and distracted. Instead of pressing ahead, they have become satisfied with a slowing pace.

A growing number of Christians today are observing signs that we may be entering the homestretch. God is pouring out His spirit among the nations (see Acts 2:17). Those who interpret these Church Planting Movements as signs of His divine intervention in history are re-examining their lives and redoubling their efforts.

Simply put, if this is of God, we want to be a part of it. Entering the homestretch, we find our pulse quickening, our pace strengthening and our resolve heightened.

**“Let us then throw off everything  
that hinders and the sin that so easily  
entangles and let us run  
with perseverance the race marked  
out before us.” (Heb. 12:1, NIV)**

## CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS GLOSSARY

**Cell churches**—small church bodies of believers, generally 10-30 per unit, meeting in homes or storefronts, fulfilling the five purposes of a church and linked to one another in some type of structured network. Often this network is part of a larger, single church identity.

**Chronological Bible storying**—a method of evangelizing a people by relating to them, in a culturally suitable manner, the great stories of the Bible from creation to redemption to the return of Christ.

**Church Planting Movement**—a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment.

**End-vision**—the ultimate and overarching aim of a strategy or plan of action. In a CPM-oriented strategy, it is the end-vision that informs and measures the relative value of every objective, goal and action step.

**Ethos**—the esprit d' corps or spirit of the group. In a CPM ethos, there is an attitude and climate of opinion that passionately aspires toward a Church Planting Movement.

**Exogenous**—originating outside of the local environment; foreign, extraneous in origin.

**Five purposes of a church**—1) worship, 2) evangelistic and missionary outreach, 3) education and discipleship, 4) ministry and 5) fellowship.

**House churches**—small bodies of approximately 10-30 believers meeting in homes or storefronts, which (unlike cell groups) are generally not organized under a single authority or hierarchy of authorities.

**Incremental growth**—growth by addition. Thus a base number of 10 churches might add a few churches each year. This contrasts with exponential growth.

**Indigenous**—generated from within or capable of originating from within the local context. This contrasts with exogenous.

**MAWL**—Model, Assist, Watch and Leave. The rhythm of implementing church planting that contributes to a Church Planting Movement as a missionary models a CPM, assists the new believers in planting CPM-oriented churches, watches to see that they and the churches are reproducing and then leaves in order to begin a new MAWL cycle.

**Mentoring**—a form of teaching that includes walking alongside the person you are teaching and inviting him or her to learn from your example.

**Multiplicative growth**—Growth characterized by each part multiplying itself. Thus two may become four, while four may become eight to 10, etc. This contrasts with incremental growth.

**POUCH churches**—a method of church planting describing churches that are characterized by the following: participative Bible study and worship groups, obedience to God's word, development of unpaid and multiple lay or bivocational church leaders and meeting in cell or house churches.

**Precision harvesting**—a strategic placement of church planters in contact with seekers or new believers who already have been identified and cultivated through their response to mass evangelism.

**Response filtering and feedback loops**—employing methods for registering response to mass evangelism efforts for purposes of follow-up discipleship and church planting.

**RLTP (Rural Leadership Training Program)**—a program of on-the-job training for church planters and church leaders developed in Cambodia aimed at practical, short-term modules of training designed to keep students engaged in their ministry while they learn.

**Strategy coordinator**—a missionary who takes responsibility for developing a comprehensive plan aimed at initiating and nurturing a Church Planting Movement among an unreached people group or population segment.

**Subsidies**—foreign funds used to support pastors and other church workers. This is generally counterproductive for a Church Planting Movement.