

All Four Items Necessary in Every Engagement?

Jim Haney

In our help manual, distributed to all IMB field personnel, we include the following statement:

Engagement is about church-planting. Specifically, engagement is about implementing church-planting strategy among each unique global entity. ... An entity is engaged when the implementation of church-planting strategy is underway. ... Finally, engagement is not adoption, provision of materials or media, focusing on a people through a prayer emphasis or the implementation of an advocacy strategy, although these are critical to church-planting.

Although we affirm many of the components of the working definition that Jeff indicates for Frontiers, we do not see these four items as necessary in every engagement. Let me take them in turn:

1. apostolic effort in residence

Those who bring the witness must not stop short of church-planting, but do they have to be resident within the people group they are engaging? Would this not rule out the non-residential missionary approach to engagement? It may well be possible and desirable that trainers are not resident within a people group but will train trainers from outside, especially if those sent are from the same affinity bloc or people cluster as the people group engaged.

2. commitment to work in the local language and culture

Again, Jeff's assumption appears to be that the actual engagement will be done by those from outside the

culture and language area. However, cannot engagement sometimes result if someone becomes a believer outside of his language and culture but then returns to engage his own people?

3. commitment to long-term ministry

Our research shows that long-term ministry is necessary if one expects to significantly impact a people group with the gospel. Short-term workers need to plug in to the ongoing ministry of a long-term network of field workers. With the emphasis these days on virtual churches, strategy-coordinator churches, or engaging churches (such as those involved in initiatives like Finishing the Task, PEACE Plan, etc.) and in light of a long history of adopting people groups, it is surprising how even the best plans never actually get to "engagement." Frontiers is committed to engagement, and the only reason to get engaged is because marriage is imminent. Frontiers missionaries – and others I commend – are in it for the long haul.

4. sowing in a manner consistent with the goal of seeing a church-planting movement (CPM) emerge

Yes, and there are many pitfalls to sowing that are not consistent with this goal. CPMs have their own metrics, and it is a different world than church growth. Missionaries consider "optimal" time for church-planting – how long does it take to plant reproducible churches without encountering many of the pitfalls that one finds where attaching for too long creates dependency? To get to a CPM, you have to do CPM things. Having accessed 13 CPMs, our department has learned a lot, and foremost among them is Jeff's point – you increase your chances of getting to a CPM by holding missionaries accountable for those things that get to a CPM. 🌐

Jim Haney is director of the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention.