



10 Church Planting MOVEMENT FAQs

David Garrison

1. What is a CPM?

A definition for Church Planting Movements (CPMs) that has held sway for more than a decade is: “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.”¹

No one recalls who first coined the term “Church Planting Movements,” though it appears to be a modification of Donald McGavran’s landmark “People Movements” adapted to emphasize the distinctiveness of generating multiplying indigenous churches.

2. What are you calling a church?

With more than 40,000 Christian denominations in the world today, it’s not surprising that there is no consensus on what constitutes a church. Some mission agencies and denominations have very precise definitions for a church while others have no definition whatsoever.² Church Planting Movements exhibit a wide range of sizes and types of church, varying with the cultural context in which they emerge. For this reason, what some may call a church, others might classify as simply a gathering, home fellowship or ‘new work.’

But this FAQ is what do you call a church? In my 2004 publication, *Church Planting Movements*, I allowed significant latitude in church identification by accepting self-designation. In other words, if those involved in the movement see themselves as a community of believers or church, I am unwilling to contradict them. This is not to say all churches are of equal quality. Churches can be more or less healthy.

At its core, a church is a community of believers seeking to obediently follow Jesus Christ. From God’s perspective, church is a continuation of what Jesus began 2,000 years ago. This is why Paul and Luke frequently refer to the church as “the body of Christ.”

In CPMs we have seen churches range in size from an average of 11.3 baptized members in Ying Kai’s Asian T4T movement to 85 in the Bhojpuri movement of

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to 35 members assessed in 2002 in the average *Isa Jamaat* of Bangladesh.

Though size and expression may vary, good ecclesiology is vital to healthy CPMs. More than one rapidly growing movement has evaporated as a result of inadequate church formation. Church matters.

In South Asia, we developed a CPM ecclesiology teaching tool called “A Handy Guide to Healthy Churches” as an orality-friendly way of teaching new believers how to develop healthy reproducing churches.³ In northeast India, CPM missionaries Jeff Sundell along with Nathan and Kari Shank have developed a simple and ingenious “Church Health Mapping” tool for tracking and developing churches from inception to maturity.⁴

3. What are CPM Best Practices?

Because there are better and worse examples of CPMs and CPM churches, why not learn from and emulate the best? The problem is that our work often occurs in isolation, particularly when we labor in restricted access fields where everyone communicates in a very guarded manner. Our knowledge exists in silos that do not allow for interchange with the broader community of learning.

Nowhere is this more true than in the world of CPMs. A CPM breaks out in one corner of the world with dramatic speed and vitality, but with weak doctrine and orthodoxy. In another corner of the world, a movement exhibits tremendous fidelity to Scripture but struggles in community transformation. Someone has said, “If the body of Christ only knew what the body of Christ knows, the body of Christ would know all it needs to know to do the work of Christ in the world.”

CPM Best Practicing is about the body of Christ learning from the body of Christ the most effective practices in being, doing, and multiplying churches among every nation tribe and tongue. How do we do this? If you’re reading this article, you’re off to a good start.

4. When did CPMs start?

Undoubtedly Church Planting Movements have been around since the first century of the Christian era. You only have to read between the lines to see Church Planting Movements as the back-story for the rise of Christianity from Christ to Constantine. In his Book of Acts, Luke reported that: “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10) and Paul commended the Thessalonians through whom “the Lord’s message... has become known everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8), and then near the end of his life could declare that “there is no more place for me to work in these regions” (Romans 15:23), because of his desire “to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (Romans 15:20).

Pliny, the governor of the *distant* province of Bithynia writing to the emperor Trajan about 50 years later warned that

“...many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. [Pliny to Trajan ca. AD 111]”⁵

Later that century, Tertullian spoke confidently to his Roman persecutors of the remarkable spread of the still fledgling church:

We are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all the places that belong to you — cities, islands, forts, towns, exchanges, the military camps themselves, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, the market-place; we have left you nothing but your temples. (Tertullian’s *Plea for Allegiance*, A.2)⁶

K.S. Latourette’s *History of the Expansion of Christianity*⁷ chronicles scores of movements to Christ through the Church’s 20-century history. But by the 19th and 20th centuries, the belief in movements was on the wane in Western missions.

A prophetic voice to the contrary was sounded by Anglican missionary Roland Allen whose 1927 *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*⁸ envisioned churches multiplying exponentially throughout the world. A generation later, Donald McGavran showed how such a movement would occur with his 1954 *Bridges of God*.⁹ A generation later, missionaries saw the realization of these insights with the appearance of *Church Planting Movements*.¹⁰

5. How many CPMs are there?

Dr. Jim Haney, director of the IMB’s Global Research Department, regularly tracks several thousand people groups and cities. Reports come through the IMB’s

more than 5,000 missionaries serving in 185 countries as well as a partnering network of evangelical sources called *HIS*, the Harvest Information System.¹¹

The Global Research Department monitors key result areas in evangelism and church planting. When a population meets three key result criteria, they automatically register on what the Global Research Department calls its “CPM Watch List.” The three criteria are:

- A 25% Annual Growth Rate in Total Churches for the past two years
- A 50% Annual Growth Rate in New Churches for the past two years
- Field-based affirmation that a CPM is emerging.

Based upon these three criteria, as of the end of the 2008 calendar year, **there are 201 people groups or population segments that have risen to the CPM Watch List.**

6. What is the fastest growing CPM?

The fastest growing CPM assessed to date is occurring today in a restricted access country in Asia. The movement which began with a new missionary assignment in November 2000 has exceeded any other movement we’ve seen with more than 1.7 million baptisms and more than 150,000 new church starts. The missionary God has used to catalyze this movement is a Chinese-American named Ying Kai. Kai calls his work “Training for Trainers” or T4T.¹²

7. How long do CPMs last?

This varies from place to place. We have instances of CPMs that began more than a decade ago and continue to grow at an annual growth rate that would qualify as an ongoing movement. We also know of movements that surged rapidly, only to halt and even implode after just a few years. This points to the importance of learning and implementing best practices.

8. How do you assess CPMs?

Great question! Rather than answer that question briefly here, we will direct you to Jim Slack’s longer article on the topic in this same publication (p. 12). Jim has years of missionary experience as the Southern Baptist International Mission Board’s Church Growth Analyst.

9. Have you ever been duped?

In short, yes. Jesus warned us to be “wise as serpents.” In both formal and informal CPM assessments we

continue to be surprised by what we uncover. Consider these five of many that could be described:

- a. In Western Europe, a missionary reported an emerging CPM in great detail for more than a year before his fabrications were unearthed, and he was dismissed from his organization.
- b. On the other hand, a missionary in India reported at least 50,000 baptisms only to have a thorough (and skeptical) CPM assessment determine that there were at least 200,000 baptisms and perhaps as many as 400,000.
- c. An Internet charlatan claiming to be a CPM catalyst in China and associated with the website www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com was exposed when he solicited donations from a Finnish Pentecostal missions organization. The Finnish agency discovered the truth when they sought a reference from the www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com webmaster who exposed the deception.
- d. A missionary serving in Nepal reported thousands of house church plants. An assessment a few years later revealed that the house churches had been assimilated into 32 mega-cell churches that had formed in the wake of the CPM.
- e. The missionary reporting the fastest growing CPM in the world with 1.7 million baptisms and 150,000 church plants in less than a decade, was found to be *under-reporting* his numbers by nearly 40 percent, in order to avoid any charges of inflation, duplication or exaggeration.

In addition to the occasional bogus movement are the aborted movements. In several locations, well-intentioned foreign dependency has intersected a promising movement, sapping it of its vitality.¹³ In other places, it has simply been impossible to ascertain whether a movement is underway or not. When this is the case, it is always best to simply say, "We don't know." The cause of Christ is never advanced by wild speculations or hype.

10. Where can I learn more about CPMs?

CPM understanding is more of a journey than a destination. As such, the call to CPMs is a call to learn, and the learning curve remains steep. One of the great challenges to CPM understanding is that so many of them are occurring in countries that are hostile to Christian witness, prompting the necessity of pseudonyms and obscured reporting. This, in turn, has led to some falsified reports by individuals seeking to benefit from riding the CPM bandwagon, resulting

in legitimate doubts about CPMs by skeptics.

We do no favors to the kingdom of God when we inflate or trumpet unrealistic reports of kingdom growth. Nor do we advance the Kingdom when we refuse to believe, despite the evidence, the existence of movements that are nothing less than our birthright as New Testament people.

In May 2010, missionary innovator and CPM trainer, Wilson Geisler, launched a new website: www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com as a clearing-house for all things related to Church Planting Movement best practices. The site is just getting underway, but already has more than two-dozen contributors, nearly 100 articles, PowerPoints, case studies and resources, and has been tapped by more than 38,000 viewers.

Geisler has constructed the site to allow iron-on-iron interaction between CPM aspirants and practitioners the world over. As a forum for participation in the growing CPM learning community, www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com is unparalleled.^f

Edited by David Garrison with contributions by Bill Smith, Jim Haney and Wilson Geisler.

Endnotes

- 1 David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Midlothian: WIGTake Resources, 2004), p. 21.
- 2 The Southern Baptist International Mission Board, for example, has a very clear definition that can be viewed here.
- 3 See "Handy Guide" article and PowerPoint on the Church Planting Movements website at: http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116:a-handy-guide-to-healthy-churches-part-one&catid=36:the-big-picture&Itemid=78
- 4 This guide can be viewed in Steve Smith with Ying Kai's, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Richmond: WIGTake Resources, 2011), pp. 253-255.
- 5 In Steve Smith with Ying Kai's, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Richmond: WIGTake Resources, 2011), p. 27.
- 6 Smith and Kai, p. 28.
- 7 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Seven Vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)
- 8 Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church*, and the causes that hinder it (London: The World Dominion Press, 1927).
- 9 Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954).
- 10 David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Midlothian: WIGTake Resources, 2004).
- 11 *H/S* includes, but is not limited to, Campus Crusade for Christ, the JESUS Film Project, the Joshua Project, Global Recordings Network, COMIBAM, Summer Institute of Linguistics, International Forum of Bible Agencies. View their website at: <https://extranet.imb.org/sites/H/S/default.aspx>
- 12 See Steve Smith with Ying Kai's *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Richmond: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 350 pp.
- 13 See for example: Cambodia, Romania, the Ukraine, as well as many places in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

