

A CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENT IS A LEADERSHIP Movement

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As we look around the world today, most dynamic Church-Planting Movements are starting in areas with poverty, crises, turmoil, persecution and few Christians. In contrast, in areas with peace, wealth, protection and many Christians, our churches are often ineffectual and in decline.

Why?

Crisis forces us to look to God. A lack of resources usually forces us to rely on God's power rather than our programs. The presence of only a few Christians means that cultural and denominational tradition is not as powerful which makes it more likely that the Bible will become the source of our strategy and principles.

What can traditional churches learn from these new movements of God?¹

While there are many lessons we can (and should) learn, some of the most critical lessons relate to leadership. In barren areas, we are forced to look for laborers in the Harvest, as new believers rise up to lead the way in reaching their own unreached people groups.

A Church-Planting Movement (CPM) is in many ways actually a church leadership multiplication and development movement. The difference between planting churches and seeing sustained movements is usually

linked to leadership development. No matter how many churches are planted, unless the cultural insiders become leaders, the churches will remain foreign and either reproduce slowly or reach a plateau when the initial leader(s) become overloaded.

Victor John is one of the leaders of a massive Church-Planting Movement among the 100 million+ people of the Bhojpuri language group of North India, formerly known as the "graveyard of modern missions." John points out that despite the presence of the church in India for almost 2000 years dating to the Apostle Thomas, 91% of Indians remain unreached with the gospel! He believes this is mainly due to a lack of leadership development.

John states that beginning in the 4th century, the early Eastern Church imported leaders from the East and used the Syriac language in worship. The Catholics in the 16th century used the local language but it was unthinkable to have local leaders. Beginning in the 18th century, Protestants appointed local leaders but the training methods remained Western and not reproducible by local leaders. "The preparation of indigenous leaders was done with a major conflict of interest. No natives, nationals, or local-workers could ever be called missionaries—this title was reserved for the whites only. These mission organizations focused on the replacement of existing leadership and not on movement or growth."²

All too often in our churches today—whether on the mission field or at home—we also focus on replacing existing leadership who will perpetuate the institution, rather than focusing on midwifing God's birth of new disciples and churches. Despite overwhelming evidence that new churches are far more effective in reaching lost people, many churches simply seek to grow larger



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instead of also starting new churches. Seminaries perpetuate this pattern by reinforcing a mind-set of managing existing churches instead of putting an equal or greater emphasis on training students to start new churches. We choose to invest the vast majority of our time and resources into our own comfort, to the neglect of those headed for an eternity in hell. (The average church spends 95% of its budget on its own people.)

As we look at modern CPMs, some clear principles of leadership multiplication and development are discernible. As we look at these principles, it is important to know that leadership development starts from the beginning. The way evangelism, discipleship, and church formation is done *IS* leadership development and sets the stage for on-going leadership development.

Vision: visionary leadership. The catalyzers of CPMs start with the belief that an entire unreached people group (UPG), city, region, and nation can and will be reached. They ask the question, “What must be done to see a movement started?” Instead of asking “What can I do?” This keeps their focus and the focus of the new believers squarely on God and forces them to rely on God to see the impossible happen. A crucial contribution of these initial outsiders is casting vision to possible partners who will join in the harvest work. For the foreign outsider, it is *critical* to find the near neighbor or inside believers who will rise up and lead the initial efforts to reach the group. As inside leaders emerge and multiply, they “catch” the same God-sized vision.

Prayer: prayer is the foundation for fruitfulness (John 14:13-14) One survey of effective church planters in a large CPM found that they were a very diverse group. The main commonality identified was that they all spent 2-4 hours a day in prayer and had special weekly and monthly times of prayer and fasting with their teams. These were not paid ministers; they each had “normal” jobs but they knew that their fruitfulness was tied to their prayerfulness. This commitment to prayer by the planters is absorbed by the new believers.

Training: everyone is trained. One woman at an Indian CPM’s leaders training said, “I don’t know why they asked me to speak about church planting. I can’t read and I can’t write. All I can do is heal the sick and raise the dead and teach the Bible. I’ve only been able to plant about 100 churches.” Don’t we wish we were all as inadequate as she is?

In CPMs, the expectation is that everyone will be trained and they are expected to immediately train

others. In one country, when asked to train leaders, we could only meet with 30 leaders due to security concerns. But each week this group trained another 150 people using the same biblical training materials.

Bible: The training manual is the Bible. One of the best ways to avoid unnecessary burdens is to use the Bible as the training manual. CPM leaders develop other leaders by helping them become dependent on the Bible and the Holy Spirit, rather than on themselves. When new believers ask questions, the church planter answers, “What does the Bible say?” They then guide them to look at various scriptures and not just their favorite proof-text. It is not that the church planter never exhorts or teaches, but his or her default is to help new believers find the answers themselves. Discipleship, church formation and leadership development are all

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Bible-centered; this is a key reason disciples, churches, and leaders are so effectively reproduced.

Obedience: obedience-based (John 14:15). The biblical training is powerful because it is not just focused on knowledge, but each person is expected to obey what he or she learns. Too many traditional churches primarily emphasize knowledge—leaders are those who have the most knowledge (i.e. education). Success is gathering more members and teaching them more information. In CPMs, the focus is *not on how much you know, it is on how much you obey*. As groups study the Bible, they ask “How will I/we obey this?” The next time they are together, they ask “How did you/we obey?” Everyone is expected to obey, but leaders emerge as those who help others obey. Obedience to the Bible is the fastest path to maturation of disciples and leaders.

Strategy: the Gospels and Acts provide the main strategy and models. Not only does the Bible contain commands, but it also contains patterns and models. In the 1990’s, various people working among the unreached were led by God to focus on Luke 10 as a pattern for mission³ into new areas. Every CPM we know of uses this pattern of outsiders (foreigners or nationals) going out two by two. They go dependently seeking the person of peace who opens their home and *oikos* (family/group), they stay with this family as they share in truth and power, and they seek to bring the whole *oikos* to commitment to Jesus. Since this is a natural group (not an unnatural group of individuals forced

together), leadership is more naturally present and just needs shaping instead of a wholesale transplant.

Empowerment: people become leaders by leading. This sounds obvious but it is often overlooked. One example of this is in the Discovery model of CPMs, where the interested *oikos* is invited to study the Bible. A key series of questions is used that will “make disciples” of those studying the story of God from Creation to Christ.⁴ In some of these CPMs, the outsider will never ask the questions. Instead he or she will meet separately to coach the insider(s) to ask the questions. The answers come from the Bible, but the question-asker(s) is learning to facilitate the learning and obedience process. An example of this is seen in *Training for Trainers* (T4T) in which each new disciple is taught to share what is learned by training others and thereby growing in leadership ability. The same principle applies as the leadership development process continues: people are given an opportunity to practice and train far more quickly than in most traditional church settings.

Biblical: biblical standards for leadership. As leaders emerge and are appointed, biblical standards are used, such as the requirements for new church leaders in Titus 1:5-9 and for established church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The roles and responsibilities are discovered and applied from a comprehensive study of leadership passages. As they do this, they find that various character elements and skills are required at each stage of the maturing church, and avoid foreign extra-biblical expectations or requirements for church leaders.

Unbiased: focus on the fruitful (Matthew 13:1-18). Leaders are not judged on their potential, personality, or style, but rather on their fruitfulness. When CPM trainers are asked how we know who will be fruitful when we first train people, we often laugh. We have no idea who will be fruitful. We train everybody and the unlikeliest are often the most fruitful while the likeliest often don't do anything. Leaders become leaders by reaching people who become their followers. As these leaders emerge, more time is given to those who are more fruitful so they can produce more fruit. Special training weekends/weeks, annual training conferences, intensive training programs (often mobile) are some of the tools used to keep developing and equipping the fruitful leader, who in turn equips others.

Shared: multiple leaders (Acts 13:1). In most CPMs, churches have multiple leaders to ensure more stability as well as to develop more leaders. One key advantage is this allows leaders to keep their existing jobs, thus enabling the movement to spread through ordinary

believers, and avoid crippling dependence on foreign funds. Leadership responsibilities are more manageable with multiple leaders and this also allows for greater wisdom and mutual support. Peer learning and support between multiple churches is also a crucial element in helping individual churches thrive.

Churches: focus on new churches. The goal of appointing and developing leaders is to see new churches planted on a regular basis. But this happens organically and naturally. As a new church starts and is full of passion for their new Lord, they are asked to repeat the pattern that led to their salvation. So they begin to look for lost persons in their networks and repeat the same process of evangelism and discipleship that they just experienced and were trained to reproduce. In this process there is often a realization that some leaders are gifted to focus inside the church (pastors, teachers, etc.) and some are gifted to focus outside (evangelists, prophets, apostles). Those inside leaders learn to lead the church to be and do all that a church should be (Acts 2:37-47) both inside and out, while the outside leaders model and equip the whole church to reach new people.

Conclusion:

What can we learn from God in these new movements he has birthed? Are we willing to let go of cherished cultural and denominational biases and use the Bible as our primary manual for birthing and developing leaders? If we will follow biblical mandates and patterns and avoid extra-biblical requirements for leaders we will see many more leaders emerge and many, many more lost people reached. What a small, small price! Yet, are we willing to make this sacrifice for the sake of the lost? f

1. CPMs are just modern expressions like many Christian movements throughout history. They are not something we have rediscovered 2000 years later. The principles have been discovered and forgotten and rediscovered many times. Examples of Christian movements in history include Acts; many peoples of the Roman Empire in the first 200 years of the church; the Church of the East which founded Christian communities stretching from the Mediterranean to China and India; the Irish evangelization of much of Northern Europe in 250 years; the Moravian mission movement; Methodism; the movements that swept through Burmese hill tribes; the last 60 years of the Church in China; and so on.
2. “The Importance of Indigenous Leadership” by Victor John in *The CPM Journal* (Jan-Mar 2006:59-60)
3. Also seen in Mark 6, Luke 9, Matthew 10. This same pattern can be seen in various adaptations in Acts.
4. After asking, 1) What they are thankful for, and 2) What are their difficulties and those of friends and families, they will read the story and have the group retell the story several times, Then they ask 3) what this story teaches us about God, 4) what this story teaches us about ourselves and other people, 5) what they believe God wants them to do in response to it individually and as a group, and 6) who they could tell this story to.