

Multiplying Movements through Organic Growth

By **ROGER CHARLES**

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It appears that perhaps 85% of new Church Planting Movements have been started by an existing movement. In our Asian context, our first six or seven movements started in four related ethnic groups and have grown to 90 strong movements in 35 ethnic groups, plus growing movement engagements in 34 other ethnic groups. Some of these new movements were started through gifted apostolic catalysts, others through a training and sending process, but *most of the new movements were started through ordinary organic growth that jumped over cultural boundaries into new ethnic groups.* This article will describe four patterns of organic growth leading to new movement starts, and four empowerment strategies that allow ordinary lay members of movements to more frequently launch new movements among unreached people groups.

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Sending Pioneers

Because many movements have been started through a strategic sending process, we often view this as the primary way new movements begin. This continues to be an important part of how Jesus is causing kingdom expansion around the world. And nowadays, we often see that it is near-culture partners, rather than far-culture pioneers, who experience early breakthroughs among an unreached group. Some movement families rely on continual training of new cadres of near-culture workers to expand their movements or multiply movements into new regions.

However, the number of true pioneers, gifted at breaking into new cultural areas, is relatively small compared to the task that lies before us. I do not want to minimize the importance of these pioneers, or of the deliberate training and sending many of them do with their own disciples. But we were surprised to find that over half the new movements started among the 69 ethnic groups above were *not started by our top leaders, or by a trained leader being sent out, but by organic growth through ordinary believers who somehow crossed cultural barriers.*

It turns out that many people within movements go into new places without ever being sent. This natural and persecution-driven migration of people has happened throughout Christian history. It began on Pentecost with visitors in Jerusalem from many nations, and is seen in Acts in the persecution that scattered believers from Jerusalem, and that which pushed Priscilla and Aquila

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out of Rome. When those who go into new cultures or regions are empowered with movement-compatible ministry patterns, *Jesus may begin new movements through simple organic growth*. Because this has happened many times, some of the leaders in movements we work with no longer focus resources on strategic sending, but rather on strategically supporting organic growth when they see disciples move into new cultures and regions.

Organic Growth

One of the hallmarks of Church Planting Movements around the world is the broad involvement of ordinary people in discipling their friends and family members, often in relatively small groups or home gatherings. The priesthood of all believers is expected and empowered. Like Jesus, leaders give much of their time and attention to empowering their disciples to make more disciples. Top leaders learn to mentor, mature, and manage networks of believers and teams of leaders across a region.

We see this organic growth like a spreading vine, which can bear a lot of fruit if it is given a little structural support, much like grapes growing on an arbor or along a cable stretched between posts. Sometimes the vine spreads into places we did not expect. We call this kind of fruit *jump-over fruit* because it has suddenly passed from my backyard into my neighbor's backyard. When this fruit jumps to new towns within the same culture, it extends an existing movement. But when the vine is transplanted into a whole new culture, a new movement may start. Jesus said the good seed of the Gospel will grow for the farmer even while he is sleeping, and *he knows not how* (Mark 4:26-29). The farmer sows, waters and at the right time puts his sickle in for the harvest!

Over the past 10 years, our teams have observed at least four regularly occurring patterns whereby organic growth by ordinary believers in their networks has resulted in a

new movement being started in another ethnic group. These patterns are *intercultural marriages*, *job migration*, *student migration*, and *industry specific-networking*.

Four Movement-Multiplying Social Patterns

The first pattern of jump-over fruit into new cultures happened through *intermarriage between ethnic groups*. Marriage between ethnicities is becoming much more common in the growing urban areas of our country. If both husband and wife have been well disciplined in one of their home cultures or in an urban mixed society, God often gives them a burden to share their faith with family members back home. If they use the simple, reproducible, low-cost patterns they have practiced before, we see small groups starting in a new region, often using the local language. When a new ethnic group (not previously reached by the original movement leader) has at least four generations of fruit and at least 1,000 believers, it counts as a new movement—organically started by a member of an existing movement. Jump-over fruit through marriage is normally entirely self-funded and self-initiated, with some intentionality by a mentor who follows up their disciple at a distance. The Spirit of God can use traveling believers, whether they travel to a receptive family or away from persecution. As emerging movements expand, they usually require further follow-up and travel by someone in the network. But they began without an initial sending plan, training budget or startup costs.



The second pattern of organic expansion into new ethnic groups and regions happened when believing family members moved into a new region or urban area in search of work. If these believers had been small group

leaders or had some clear connection to a mentor from their home area, they were often able to establish a new set of small groups within the new region, without any special training. They simply followed the pattern that they knew from their home area. This would generally first attract people from a similar cultural background or language group but might easily expand into the mix of coworkers from other places, who were also a part of their factory, construction site, or business segment. Whenever this resulted in a whole new ethnic group beginning to be reached, it became a new movement. We call this jump-over fruit *through job migration*.

The third pattern of organic expansion, and the one that *has probably moved us into the most new ethnic groups*, has been jump-over fruit through *student migration*. One of our younger catalysts with a strong academic bent began focusing on university campuses in the educational center where he lives. As groups began to multiply across multiple campuses and in multiple dormitories, he was dismayed to realize that most of his senior leaders were about to graduate and leave the area! He took this problem to his mentors, who coached him through a series of discussions on how this could be an opportunity rather than disaster.

First, he realized that “losing” people with experience at leading groups was actually an opportunity to place experienced people in new places around the country, as long as they continued to be mentored. Second, he saw that this was a recurring problem, and needed to be planned into the way juniors and seniors in the universities were treated every year. Third, he decided that the most important graduates to focus on were those moving furthest away into Unreached People Groups. Identifying those students among the many different campuses became a priority during the end of their junior year and beginning of their senior year. Once identified, those students moving into unreached peoples were immediately given additional attention and training, as well as opportunities to lead a group during their senior year.

With this new perspective on graduating student leaders, this particular movement has begun movements in at least 15 Unreached People Groups and has movement starts in many other peoples. In this case, although people

are not recruited or formally sent out, some intentional training and mentoring is strategically leveraging this natural, recurring migration process.

For example, one team has helped create many backyard fish ponds. Through these business cooperatives, they have been able to meet people in many villages, allowing many small social groups to become spiritual discussion groups.



The fourth and final broad pattern for multiplying new movements through organic growth is the development of *industry-specific networks* of disciples. Because we place a very high value on community development and meeting local felt needs, many of our leaders have developed job-creation strategies or invested in a specific business or government segment. For example, one team has helped create many backyard fish ponds. Through these business cooperatives, they have been able to meet people in many villages, allowing many small social groups to become spiritual discussion groups. One team has trained cadres of civil servants to do their jobs more effectively, and believers in those units can be transferred by the government to other cultural regions. Another top leader has trained agricultural cooperative leaders and is paid by the government to travel to multiple regions of the country, where he has started new groups. Yet another leader has empowered a specific group of business women and another group of salesmen whose jobs regularly take them into different cultural regions. By developing strong groups of disciples along naturally-

occurring business and social segments, including some highly mobile businesses, the organic growth of one movement can result in new movements.

A number of other organic growth patterns may well emerge over time, but these four patterns are already multiplying new movements. Although these naturally-occurring social patterns happen frequently in the modern world, they do not necessarily produce movements. What are some of the primary empowerment strategies that allow these social relationships to spread movements? Our near-culture leaders have some initial answers to this question.

Strategic Empowerment For Movement Multiplication

The first empowerment strategy is to *keep the methodologies very simple and focused on Scripture* rather than on highly trained leaders. The smaller and simpler the groups, the more easily they can be led by ordinary people from any walk of life. Because the focus is on Scripture as the authority (not a trained leader), a distant set of small groups in a new cultural setting can grow even without a full-time worker. This growth may be slower without a teacher nearby, but it does mature if mentored. At least seven ethnic groups have moved off the Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPG) lists since 2017— not because a worker was sent to the people, but because we have dozens or hundreds of believers among them now.

The second empowerment strategy that must be in place is *long distance mentoring*. When a movement is confined to a small local area and one day's travel radius, it can grow very rapidly and problems can be handled by strong and mature local leaders. However, when the distances or the numbers involved grow greater, a clear system for tracking, communication, and accountability with mentors must be developed. Modern smartphone apps allow mentors to send messages, small videos, audio Bible segments, and fruit-tracking charts over great distances and out to multiple generations of disciples. The Holy Spirit uses prayer and mentors with good tools to help local movements expand into many more generations. Long-distance mentoring tools become even more important when whole new cultural groups are reached far away from the parent movement's home culture.

A third empowerment strategy is a *social network orientation*. Whereas many Western cultures approach ministry expansion primarily in geographic terms or physical building sites, the organic growth of movements happens along relational lines. Extended family units, tribal connections, marriage contracts, and loyal friendship networks are the highways of organic growth. We expect God, who opened one family to the Gospel, to also open some of their social network. This is one way to “focus on fruit.” We believe the seeds of the next harvest can be found in the existing fruit: in the relationships, skill sets, and local resources already available. If we focus too much on physical geography or outside resources, our movements reach natural limitations much sooner. A social-network orientation keeps the focus on *the Spirit's work in people*, not places or things.

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A fourth empowerment strategy that helps movements multiply new movements among unreached peoples is *investment in regional hubs*. Each of our movement catalysts has reached crisis points where what worked with a few dozen groups does not work with a few hundred groups, and what worked with a few hundred groups does not work with a thousand groups. As our leaders help their core team develop regional teams, especially in key transportation hubs and urban centers, the burden of leadership has moved outward, closer to the edges of the movement. These regional hubs are what we call transfer zones, places that grow mobile, multi-cultural individuals and communities. Giving away



authority to regional hubs helps the localization of the Gospel to continue and puts movement strategies into play closer to nearby unreached peoples. This kind of servant leadership, giving power away and honoring local people, has been a key factor in the multiplication of new movements far beyond their home culture. Holding onto too much control in the center diminishes movement multiplication.



We are still in the early decades of understanding how God is bringing people into his kingdom through movements. We have much to learn as we listen to one another and try variations of some core biblical strategies, in very different cultural settings. Many of the new starts happen through very gifted apostolic leaders. But we also see God using some broad social migration patterns to multiply movements through ordinary believers in different cultural spaces. As we empower the whole body for the whole harvest, we expect to see more and more regions where there is “no place left” that the Gospel is not spreading with power and full conviction!

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