

# EDITORIAL COMMENT



## Rapidly Multiplying Churches: Are We Willing to Change to See them Happen?

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

If I asked you, “Should every person on earth have the opportunity to understand the gospel and follow Jesus regardless of his language, culture and location?” You would likely say “Of course, but how? We have never been able to accomplish such a huge task thus far.” But should that stop us? The worthiness of a task is what counts, not its difficulty.

In order to provide every person with access to the gospel, we would need to have enough churches within every people group so that each person would have access to a fellowship of Jesus followers. Is it possible to see the kind of rapid multiplication of communities of faith within every people that would make it possible for every person to have access to the gospel? There is growing evidence that it is.

This kind of rapid multiplication of believers and churches has actually been happening in dozens of places all over the world within every major sphere of unreached peoples: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Tribal, etc. They have been referred to as Church Planting Movements or CPMs. So why don't we see this happening in more places, both here in the West where the church has stagnated and among unreached peoples where the gospel has not yet taken hold? Are these Church Planting Movements an aberration within God's sovereignty, like a storm that suddenly rolls through and is gone? Or is there something we can do to cooperate with God's desire that all should come to a knowledge of the Truth? Can we learn from what God has been doing in these various peoples around the world so we can see more of these Church Planting

Movements take place, perhaps even within every people? That is what this issue of *MF* is all about.

For the last couple decades David Garrison and his colleagues at the Southern Baptist International Mission Board have been studying these amazing movements to see what we can learn from them and then apply the lessons learned to the many peoples that still need a church planting breakthrough. While there are many common elements that are present in all CPMs that can be applied in various contexts, we must be careful to realize that every situation is different and many factors can affect the results. In every situation we must depend on God's Spirit to work through the messiness of human relationships. But perhaps what has been learned from studying CPMs can help us all increase the likelihood of CPMs taking place and avoid the unnecessary mistakes that have kept us from making greater progress in reaching all peoples.

While many organizations have been involved in CPMs, no organization has studied CPMs and what makes them tick as thoroughly as the Southern Baptists. We have enlisted their help with this issue so that the entire Body of Christ can benefit from their decades of intense study and analysis of these incredible movements of God.

Some have questioned the numbers for CPMs reported in this issue as “too good to be true.” Accurate statistics on CPMs are exceedingly difficult to ascertain since by their nature these movements have an indigenous life of their own beyond the gaze of outsiders. We applaud the great pains taken by the IMB to provide accurate numbers and reduce the risk of over-reporting. (see

p.14) At the same time, the overall mission community needs to join with the IMB in wrestling with the assessment and reporting process for these emerging movements. Until substantial studies prove otherwise the numbers presented here by the IMB, represent the best information available at this time.

Further research work is needed in the area of Church Planting Movements, and the Southern Baptists are looking for greater collaboration among agencies of many Evangelical backgrounds. They invite the participation of those ministry leaders that want to understand CPM principles and apply them for the greater benefit of the wider Body of Christ. You may contact David Garrison through his website at [www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com](http://www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com) for more information on how you can be involved.

### Are We Willing to Change?

It is one thing to learn the principles and practices of ministry that God is using to bring people to himself in large numbers with rapidly multiplying churches. It is another thing to make the necessary changes that will make CPMs possible. Perhaps much of the Church and its mission is locked into models of ministry and ways of thinking that prevent CPMs from taking place.

B.D.B. Moses illustrates this point in his article on page 19, “Sometimes existing Christian leaders negatively impact the movement.... Pastors who want to see growth in their own congregations often resist forming new house churches. These traditional church leaders see church buildings as essential, and even new believers may share this view, thus stunting the growth of the CPM.”

A favorite saying of CPM trainers is that: "You Will Keep Getting What You Have Been Getting If You Keep Doing What You Have Been Doing." In order to get better results, we have to open ourselves up to changing the way we have always done things. This must be the way we approach every aspect of ministry, not just CPMs.

In the West especially, we seldom see churches planting other churches. Most churches want to grow bigger where they are and seldom think about rapid-multiplication church planting.

### If We Continue to Insist...

If we continue to insist that we must have a church building in order to have a church, then we will not see CPMs multiply and grow. We must understand that a church is people, not brick and mortar. A home or apartment or a tree with shade can house a church, too. If

we have to wait to build a special church building in order to establish a new church, we will never be able to move fast enough to provide access to the gospel for every person, tribe and tongue.

If we continue to insist that every church be led by professional, seminary-trained, full-time clergy, then we will never have enough pastors to lead the millions of new churches that are needed. We must release and equip all believers for the work of the ministry and empower them to start and lead new churches. It is the only way to fully disciple each people group.

If we continue to insist on supporting emerging movements with foreign funding, then we have employed the surest way to sap them of their indigenous momentum and destroy any hopes of a Church Planting Movement. The best role of the missionary—whether

Western or non-Western—is that of a catalyst, a model and initiator for a multiplying movement that will continue long after he or she has returned home.

If we continue to violate every aspect of ministry that has characterized CPMs over the last two decades of research and study, then we should not be surprised when we do not see Church Planting Movements developing in our midst. It is for us to decide how much we want the Church to grow and expand and how much we are willing to give up in order to see it happen.

### What Is It Going To Take?

Ten years ago Wycliffe Bible Translators realized that at the current rate that they were translating Scripture, it would take over 150 years for them to begin a translation project in all of the language groups that needed a translation. They decided that this was not acceptable. They went about the task of evaluating everything they did in order to see how they could get a translation project started within every people that needed one by 2025. They revolutionized their processes, procedures and relationships with other translation organizations all over the world. They are now on target to reach their goal by 2038, cutting 112 years off their timetable.

Likewise, the Church as a whole needs to become dissatisfied with our current rate of progress and embark on a similar process of evaluation to see how we can hasten the day when every person from every tribe and tongue has access to the gospel. The study and evaluation of CPM strategies and other best practices in missionary outreach is part of that process of determining what it is going to take to get the job done. We will then need the courage and commitment to implement the needed changes to reach every people. The glory of God in all the Earth is worthy of the sacrifices we will have to make. †

### Late-Breaking News

- More FREE books, 120 of 4 titles related to CPMs. Get them before the book you want is gone. See [missionfrontiers.org/marchpromo](http://missionfrontiers.org/marchpromo).
- Bible scholar responds to Christianity Today article on Muslim-focused Bible translations. See the MF website for more information.

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What's It Going To Take?

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— Dr. Jerry Rankin, Pres. Emeritus  
International Mission Board, SBC




**Church Planting Movements**

Available at:  
[www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com](http://www.ChurchPlantingMovements.com)



**The Camel**



**Camel Workshop**

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