

Editorial Comment



Learning from the Mission Field How to Plant Churches

Rick Wood, Editor, *Mission Frontiers*

Short-term missions are legendary for their pitfalls and problems. We have spoken numerous times in *MF* about our concerns and the damage that many short-term mission efforts have done. Poorly prepared teams of people going on poorly-planned and -coordinated expeditions at exorbitant cost to sensitive mission fields have often been the norm rather than the exception.

But many thoughtful leaders have sought to overcome these problems and have developed the Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Missions. Every church or mission group should study these guidelines and learn from them before sending out their next short-term mission team. Go to www.soe.org for more information. Another helpful part of the preparation for short-term team members is to have them go through the *Perspectives* course before they leave? Go to www.perspectives.org for more information. Online study is also available.

Instead of going over the failures of short-term missions one more time, we decided to provide some inspirational and strategically significant stories of short-term mission teams that are making a long-term impact on the expansion of the Church in previously unreached people groups. What we present here are not evangelicals on a vacation but examples of well-trained short-term volunteers fitting into highly-focused and well-executed long-term strategies in pursuit of ongoing Church Planting Movements (CPM). This is the complete opposite of amateurism in missions. In fact, there is plenty that all of us can learn from the experience of Curtis Sergeant and the church planting strategies that he has employed in literally transforming the people group with

which he worked. We highlight his story in our lead article starting on page 6.

Learning From the Field

How is it that by most accounts the Church is not growing in the West, but in numerous places, like where Curtis Sergeant served, there are rapidly growing Church Planting Movements that are transforming entire peoples or regions? What have they learned that we need to apply? Will the church in the West continue to stagnate and decline in its influence on the surrounding culture, or will we learn the lessons from the mission field of how churches can grow and multiply? The future of the West may depend on it.

Knowledge vs. Obedience

Does God care more about how much we know or about how much we obey what we know? In the West we are prone to think that the acquisition of knowledge of Scripture is equivalent to maturity in Christ. We spend our time listening to sermons, going to Bible studies and even attending Bible school and seminary—all in the pursuit of knowledge. After gaining all of this knowledge, how much of it is actually applied in obedience? It is not what we know but what we obey what we know that will change our lives and transform the lives of others.

Only a small percentage of church members obey Jesus by regularly sharing their faith or discipling others, even fewer plant new churches. Yet in Church Planting Movements the focus is on immediate obedience that leads to growing maturity. As soon as someone comes to faith in Jesus, he is taught how to share his testimony and the gospel and he obeys what he has learned by doing it. He develops a lifestyle of sharing his faith

regularly at every opportunity. When these new disciples do lead someone to Christ, they are immediately taught how to disciple them and start new churches. Whatever they learn they obediently apply by teaching it to others. At the very start of their relationship with Christ the DNA of obedience-based maturity is established and then passed on to others in succeeding generations of disciples. The expectation is that every believer has the potential to be a soul winner, disciple-maker and church planter. That expectation leads to multi-generational discipleship and church planting. We cannot leave the job of building God's kingdom to just the professionals.

When I was a child, my father told me that the best way to learn is to teach others. All too often, in the West, only the pastor and a few others actually learn by teaching. The rest of us are passive listeners who seldom remember, much less apply, what we hear in church. As a result, new believers are trained to sit and listen, and are often discouraged from getting involved in ministry because "they do not know enough yet." Right away they are taught to be passive in their faith and leave the work of ministry to the paid professionals. Is it any wonder that the Church in the West has stagnated? All of us must become doers of the Word and not just hearers.

Accountability

At the heart of every Church Planting Movement is loving accountability to obey what they are taught. At every stage of a believer's development, accountability keeps them moving forward toward active involvement in ministry and maturity in Christ. Some have expressed concern that with the rapid growth of churches characteristic of CPMs that sound doctrine will be lost. However, just

the opposite is true because of the accountability that is built into the process of CPM multiplication. Because of the close accountable relationship between the discipler and the ones that he trains, deviations from sound doctrine can be caught early before unbiblical beliefs become engrained and are spread to others.

What kind of accountability is there in our current church structure? Virtually none. Because of the lack of accountable discipleship taking place in today's churches, believers can easily get off track in what they believe without anyone stepping in to correct them.

George Barna stated in 2009 that only 19% of self-proclaimed born-again Christians had a biblical worldview based on the acceptance of foundational beliefs such as absolute truth, the accuracy of the Bible, the literal existence of Satan, salvation by grace alone, the sinless nature of Jesus and God as the all-powerful Creator.¹ Unless we want both stagnant growth and a lack of sound doctrine, something is wrong with our model! We must change the way we do church in the

West. Does it make sense to spread our current patterns of doing church to every tribe and tongue? For more information on the best practices in Church Planting Movements, see the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, which we have excerpted starting on page 21.

The Great Translation Debate

On page 26 we feature a landmark article regarding the standards for translating divine familial terms such as Father, Son etc., written by Rick Brown and other Bible translation colleagues. There has been a great deal of controversy regarding this topic with translators being accused of changing the meaning of the original text to bypass theological objections of Muslims and others. In fact, translators are avoiding a wrong meaning, namely, biological procreation. Such a meaning is inconsistent with the Hebrew and Greek words used and it is contrary to the nature of God's fatherhood and Jesus' sonship. Bible translation agencies have taken the only responsible position that they can by their commitment to translate the original meaning of the Hebrew

and Greek as accurately as possible. I urge the critics of the translators to choose to believe the best about their brothers and sisters in the Lord who have taken on this difficult translation assignment. They deserve our appreciation for the tremendous sacrifices they have made to do this work. They also deserve our maximum efforts to understand the process of translation and the difficult choices involved in overcoming language barriers. Please study this article carefully.

Starting 2012 on a Strong Note

Although we did not meet our goal of 1500 gifts of \$180 in 2011, we did receive gifts that were equal to 455 of these gifts. Please help us start 2012 strong with your gift of any amount. If you would like to receive an email notice when *MF* is available on our website and when other opportunities for involvement arise, please go to www.missionfrontiers.org/ email to give us your email address. f

¹ Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years, March 6, 2009, The Barna Group of Ventura, CA, www.barna.org

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