

PEOPLES ON THE MOVE: CAN THE CHURCH COPE WITH MOBILE MISSION FIELDS?



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We are a planet on the move. More people are moving to more places, more rapidly than at any time in human history. With rapid transportation available to increasing numbers of people, the unreached peoples of the world many times are moving in next door to us. Will the Church have the vision and strategic insights necessary to effectively reach them with the gospel and then send them back as missionaries to their homelands?

Completing the task of bringing the gospel to every person, tribe and tongue will depend upon whether the Church will effectively tackle this challenge of mission fields on the move and “the strangers next door.”

Missions is no longer simply a matter of geography—putting people on planes and sending them overseas to somewhere else. It is all about the priority task of identifying cultural and linguistic barriers to the gospel and overcoming them—no matter where they present themselves—12,000 miles away or next door. As a kingdom of priests we are called to be on mission with God. It is our job to reach the unreached peoples in our midst—no matter from where they come and no matter what the barriers to reaching them. This is not a job to be left to the pastors—who are supposed to “equip the saints for the work of ministry...” (Eph. 4:12). We must seek the best training, preparation and resources to take on this task even if some pastors do not have the slightest idea about how to go about reaching the unreached in our midst. As individuals, we must take the initiative to find these “strangers next door” and learn how to lead them to Jesus.

But here lies the central question. How well equipped are we to disciple anyone, not to mention going cross-culturally to do so? The focus of our churches has not been on training people to be soul winners, disciple-makers and church-planters. The focus has been on gathering people into large groups and speaking to them in a lecture format called a sermon. The focus

of most Western churches is on worship, teaching and fellowship but generally not on equipping every believer to be a disciple-maker.

God has provided us with stellar examples from around the world of how simple obedience to the Word by average believers can transform entire peoples as they apply Church-Planting Movement principles. These principles of multigenerational discipleship and church-planting can be employed anywhere and lead to the rapid replication of disciples and churches among a people. Greater Europe Mission has retooled its efforts in Europe to apply these principles of multigenerational discipleship to reach the Muslim refugees that are traveling through this area. Their goal is to initiate Discipleship- and Church-Planting Movements in 50 of the major cities of Europe. See page 10 for more on this dramatic change in strategy that is bearing much fruit.

By learning and applying these principles, you could be the one God will use to initiate a Church-Planting Movement among a people that has moved in next door to you. See the articles on pages 22 and 26 for more information on various strategies for making disciples and planting churches. See also the information for the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* by Steve Smith with Ying Kai on the inside back cover for detailed instructions on how to apply these CPM principles.

By means of His sovereign will, God has brought many unreached peoples into our midst so that they will have access to the gospel. But how many churches are even aware of the ethnic diversity that surrounds them? And if they are aware do they really care to reach people who are very different from themselves? Will we ignore them, preferring the company of people who are like us? Or will we obey God’s command to disciple all nations and equip ourselves to reach out to them with the gospel? God gives us the choice of whether we will be on mission with Him or simply a passive listener of sermons for our own edification. The church must change its focus from just sermon delivery to equipping disciple-makers if we are to make progress in world evangelization.

PLANTING MOBILE CHURCHES

Our whole imagery of *planting* churches indicates a static church. Plants are by their nature rooted in one spot and do not move. So how does a church planted in one particular location begin a movement to Christ among an unreached people or refugees often on the move? It involves a complete shift in ministry strategy and focus from an attractional/centripetal focus to a centrifugal focus. As explained on page 10 of the article *The Brutal Facts of Church Planting*, in the July-August 2012 issue of *MF*:

Centrifugal forces push objects outward away from the center. Centrifugal forces are at work in Church-Planting Movements (CPMs). Rather than joining a central, mother church, CPM churches spin out to form new bodies of believers within the communities of lost persons that they eventually reach for Christ. Contrast this with centripetal forces, which characterize our Western church model. In the West, there is little incentive for a pastor to spin off his church members into multiplying new (yet small) congregations of believers.

The key to reaching mobile people is to equip them to be mobile disciple-makers and church-planters—to use a little centrifugal effort to release them to begin new churches among their own people as well as back in their homeland. With this approach no matter when they leave our neighborhoods they are equipped to start new churches wherever they go. If we try to keep them within our churches with attractional/centripetal force then we will not be equipping them for reproduction when they leave and thereby stifling the potential development of a Church-Planting Movement within their families and spheres of influence.

But in a real sense, we are all people on the move and the best strategy

is *always* to train everyone who will respond to be disciple-makers and church-planters. That way no matter who comes to our churches and no matter when or if they do leave for another part of the country or the world they will be equipped to start a new church wherever they land.

WE NEED A CHANGE OF IDENTITY

We must change the way we think about church and our role in it. Every believer needs to have the identity of a disciple-maker not a church member or attender. Every believer must see that he has an active role to play in fulfilling the Great Commission. Every believer has already been called to be involved in ministry and it is his or her job to discover the specific role that God has for him or her. We have to get away from the idea that all God expects of us is to go to church on Sunday and give our tithe.

The identity of the Church needs to change as well. Many pastors seem to think that if they have good programs to attract people to the church and they preach a good message, they have done their job. If the people of a church are not equipped to be disciple-makers then the job is still undone. Every church *must become a training center for multigenerational discipleship and church planting*, not just a worship center. This is the only way to deal effectively with a mobile world and the only way that there is any hope of bringing the gospel to every person, tribe and tongue. A Church full of passive people, whose only significant role is as listeners, is an easy target for defeat. But Satan cannot defeat the Church when the majority of its people are trained as disciple-makers and deployed into action on behalf of the unreached—no matter where they may roam. 

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