

Framing a New Model of Training Cross-Cultural Church Planters

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INTRODUCTION

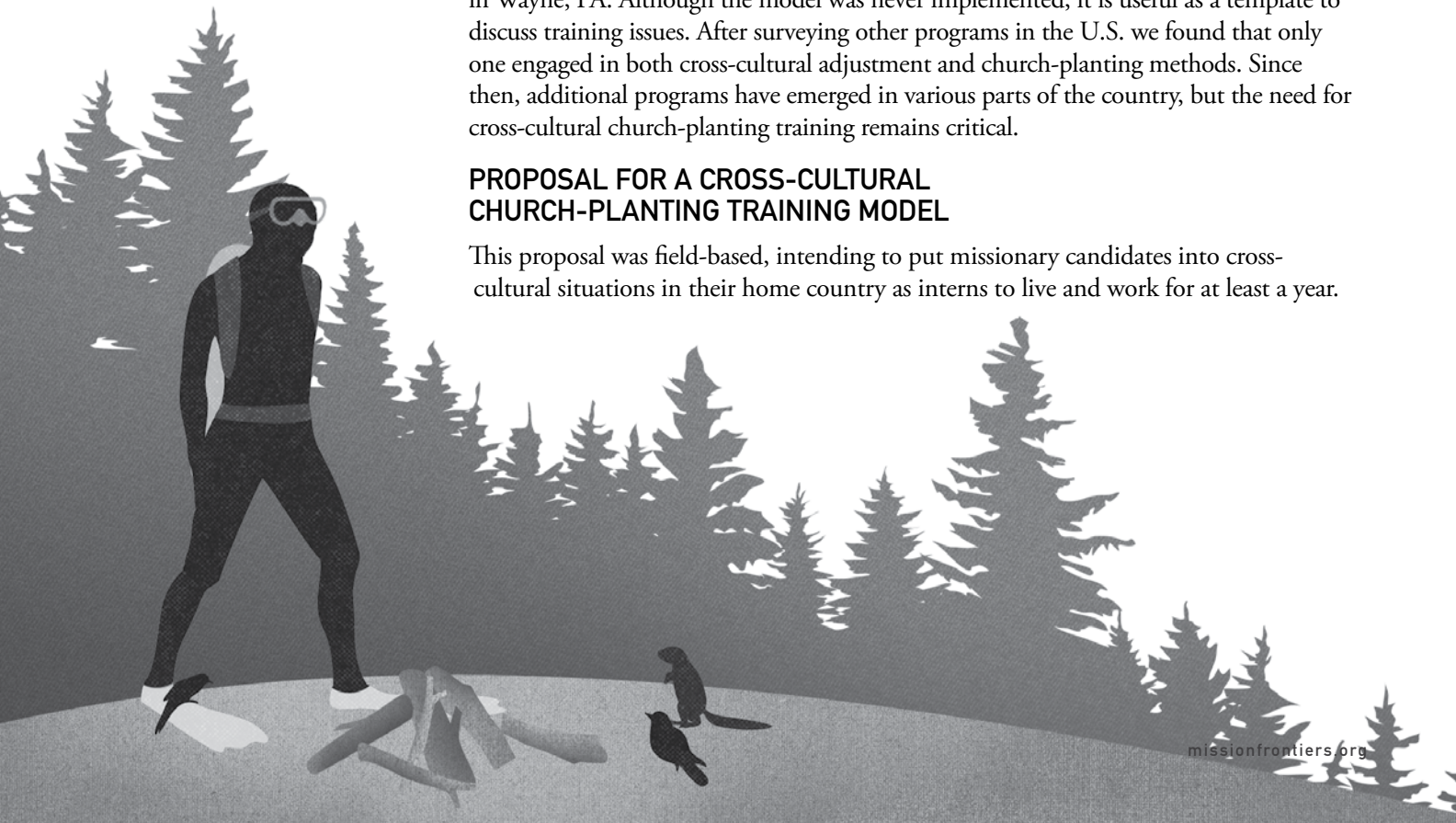
Confusion of massive proportions is taking place across the missionary enterprise. Great cultural change in the world has thwarted both young and old so that many are unable to engage successfully in cross-cultural church-planting. Political and religious opposition as well as emotional stress are partly responsible for this. But the greatest problem seems to be a lack of skill in cross-cultural church-planting. Some agencies report as high as 47% of their personnel leave the field in the first 5 years.¹ Others stay longer but do not really succeed in planting churches. This is a tragic waste of outstanding and committed people. We cannot expect them to do a job they have never been trained to do, and that is exactly the case which I want to address in this article. I want to suggest two things: 1) the type of training modern missionaries need in order to plant churches cross-culturally, and 2) the time and place where that training should initially take place.

CREATING THE TRAINING MODEL

In 1999, a team created a cross-cultural church-planting model for Church of the Savior in Wayne, PA. Although the model was never implemented, it is useful as a template to discuss training issues. After surveying other programs in the U.S. we found that only one engaged in both cross-cultural adjustment and church-planting methods. Since then, additional programs have emerged in various parts of the country, but the need for cross-cultural church-planting training remains critical.

PROPOSAL FOR A CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH-PLANTING TRAINING MODEL

This proposal was field-based, intending to put missionary candidates into cross-cultural situations in their home country as interns to live and work for at least a year.



Generally speaking this required them to live in urban areas where there was a significant immigrant population that still spoke their native language. The interns would rent living quarters and secure jobs in the area where they would raise part of their living expenses. It would probably be necessary for their church or agency to add to their income. The challenge of finding and fulfilling a job in a cross-cultural neighborhood would give them valuable experience for future assignments. Family and singles, housing would enhance immersion in the ethnic community. They would then partner with a local church to implement a church plant among their focus group. If the candidates had children, they would experience the challenges of raising their children in an ethnic neighborhood.

By doing this, the interns would achieve a two-fold objective:

1. They would learn to relate to a new culture while being given tools to understand emotional, spiritual, and lifestyle challenges.
2. They would participate in the planting of a local congregation within a culturally different community while being coached in the observation and adaptation of biblical church-planting patterns in cross-cultural contexts.

PREREQUISITES

The following prerequisites were established in order to assure that potential candidates were being trained for cross-cultural church-planting.

1. Each intern was expected to demonstrate spiritual and emotional maturity, a distinct call to unreached peoples ministry, and no personal problems or hindrances that would embarrass them in ministry.
2. Each intern was expected to have finished his/her formal training, Bible and religious studies, and/or degree work.
3. Each intern was expected to have completed the spiritual formation program at his or her home church.
4. Each intern understood that this internship was arduous and had released him/herself from other work or encumbrances to give full time to this program.

EXPERIENCED-BASED, COACH-INTENSIVE

Since this was formulated to be an experienced-based, coach-intensive program, we envisioned it to have several stages. In *Stage One*, the intern would follow a lesson-based course lasting from 8-12 weeks. The intern and family should attend. The interns would be in the classroom about one day a week studying the theory and process of cross-cultural church-planting, linguistics, and psychological/emotional debriefing/evaluation procedures. *Stage Two* would overlap with *Stage One*, covering a year

during which the intern would be assigned to work in a team model under the supervision of a church planter and a missionary coach. Here the tasks were envisioned to be both theoretical and applied in nature. Communication

lines between the worker and the coach would be open at all times through e-mail or phone.

The intern would be assigned to cross-cultural church-planting preferably among an ethnic population that is the focus group of the candidate. All aspects of the intern's fieldwork would be under the authority of the local area church that is his partner. A missionary coach would be assigned to the intern. This coach would be in regular contact with the intern and his partner church in order to give guidance on any area of cross-cultural or church-planting questions which arise.

The intern would also seek to develop a spiritual support group. This might be from the local area church, from his/her home church, or from a combination of churches. This support group would pray for and with the intern and family and would aid them in preparing spiritually and emotionally for departure to a foreign land. This group would pledge to pray for and maintain contact with the intern and family as co-workers in the harvest.

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS TRAINING PROGRAM

When workers have not had any experience in how a church is organized and operated, they cannot envision what they are trying to accomplish among the unreached people group. Churches have structure. This includes theology, worship, liturgy, organization, polity (government), and various infrastructure. When a worker helps create a church plant, it is necessary to have a concept in mind toward which to work. The goal is not to plant a clone church of another culture but rather birth an

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indigenous church. This would not be a fellowship where no one has responsibility to train evangelists, pastors, or lay leaders. A fellowship does not develop its own literature, music, or youth camps. The church-planting team must have an idea of the kind of congregation that will thrive in the UPG and have long-term success in all those aspects of ministry. This training program seeks those goals.

The major problem that most cross-cultural church planters face is a lack of church-planting experience. If one has not done church-planting in one's home country, it will be difficult to do it in a foreign country. The reason is pretty simple and should be obvious. Pioneer church-planting involves a complex series of competencies that are only truly understood when one has had some previous involvement. A false perception that people will suddenly understand the complexities of disciple-making, church theology and organization when they go to another country often leads to immature outcomes.

BENEFITS OF CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH-PLANTING TRAINING

"Preparation is not something suddenly accomplished, but a process steadily maintained," notes Oswald Chambers.² This program speaks to all the important weaknesses that lead to missionary attrition because it integrates the competencies needed to do cross-cultural church-planting. These include spiritual disciplines, family dynamics, team building, work experience, nurturing children, and learning to partner with national peers. In addition, this training program prepares a worker in language acquisition, cross-cultural communication and comparative religion. These are all competencies required for a successful cross-cultural church planter. Examples of the competencies can be found in the International Missionary Training Fellowship publication.³

A serious issue in today's world is preparation for trauma. Every cross-cultural church-planting model should have the experience of trauma or hostage training. Dr. Steve Sweatman of Mission Training International has commented that "more and more of those we debrief have experienced some significant trauma related to bodily threat or damage. We have noticed that there are three distinct missionary eras:

The era when Western Expats and missionaries were considered TERRIFIC

The era when Western Expats and missionaries were TOLERATED

The era when Western Expats and missionaries are now TARGETED

For those we debrief, 50% are coming from countries in the TOLERATED era and the other half from countries where they are in the TARGETED era."⁴

TRAIN IN THE HOMELAND

Many of us have become convinced that training new workers in their homeland is the most effective way to alleviate these problems. However, this requires a significant shift in attitude by all parties. The candidates must be willing to add another year to their training while the churches must be willing to finance them during this time. It will cost far less in dollars because it will reduce the number of those who return without engaging their focus group. The financial loss by these resignations is much greater than a year's training would cost. In "Understanding Missionary Support," Daryl Anderson writes: "The average cost to support a missionary family from North America is \$10,338 per month.⁵ A cross-cultural church-planting training program in the US would cost the church less than half that because the intern would also be making money at his/her secular job.

Obstacles of all kinds can be overcome with preparation for cross-cultural church-planting in a UPG. Such preparation takes time and cannot be accomplished simply by taking a few summer courses and short-term mission trips. Also, training at home is more efficient because it means that the worker is able to (1) integrate more quickly with his or her team on the field and be an effective member and (2) not be a physical and emotional drain on team members who must spend considerable effort training them. The team gains a prepared worker while not expending the skills of a seasoned veteran. MF

¹ William D. Taylor (Ed.), *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), p.13.

² Oswald Chambers, *So Send I You*, (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), p.40.

³ Jonathan Lewis, (Ed.), "Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries," International Missionary Training Fellowship, WEF, (September 1991). [also see: August 1993.]

⁴ Steve Sweatman, e-mail, Sept. 1, 2012.

⁵ Daryl Anderson, EFCA Reach Global-8-2008. Available on the Internet at: Understanding Missionary Support - EFCA.org www.efca.org/files/.../understanding-missionary-support-0812_0.pdf

