

### 3 TEN UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS

After surveying Church Planting Movements around the world, we found at least 10 elements present in every one of them. While it may be possible to have a Church Planting Movement without them, we have yet to see this occur. Any missionary intent on seeing a Church Planting Movement should consider these 10 elements.

#### 1. Prayer

Prayer has been fundamental to every Church Planting Movement we have observed. Prayer typically provides the first pillar in a strategy coordinator's master plan for reaching his or her people group. However, it is the vitality of prayer in the missionary's personal life that leads to its imitation in the life of the new church and its leaders. By revealing from the beginning the source of his power in prayer, the missionary effectively gives away the greatest resource he brings to the assignment. This sharing of the power source is critical to the transfer of vision and momentum from the missionary to the new local Christian leadership.

#### 2. Abundant gospel sowing

We have yet to see a Church Planting Movement emerge where evangelism is rare or absent. Every Church Planting Movement is accompanied by abundant sowing of the gospel. The law of the harvest applies well: "If you sow abundantly you will also reap abundantly." In Church Planting Movements, hundreds and even thousands of individuals are hearing the claims that Jesus Christ has on their lives. This sowing often relies heavily upon mass media evangelism, but it always includes personal evangelism with vivid testimonies to the life-changing power of the gospel.

The converse to the law of the harvest is also true. Wherever governments or societal forces have managed to intimidate and stifle Christian witness, Church Planting Movements have been effectively eliminated.

#### 3. Intentional church planting

In every Church Planting Movement, someone implemented a strategy of deliberate church planting before the movement got under way. There are several instances in which all the contextual elements were in place, but the missionaries lacked either the skill or the vision to lead a Church Planting Movement. However, once this ingredient was added to the mix, the results were remarkable.

Churches don't just happen. There is evidence around the world of many thousands coming to Christ through a variety of means without the resulting development of multiple churches. In these situations, an intentional church-planting strategy might transform these evangelistic awakenings into full-blown Church Planting Movements.

#### 4. Scriptural authority

Even among nonliterate people groups, the Bible has been the guiding source for doctrine, church polity and life itself. While Church Planting Movements have occurred

among peoples without the Bible translated into their own language, the majority had the Bible either orally or in written form in their heart language. In every instance, Scripture provided the rudder for the church's life, and its authority was unquestioned.

### **5. Local leadership**

Missionaries involved in Church Planting Movements often speak of the self-discipline required to mentor church planters rather than do the job of church planting themselves. Once a missionary has established his identity as the primary church planter or pastor, it's difficult for him ever to assume a back-seat profile again. This is not to say that missionaries have no role in church planting. On the contrary, local church planters receive their best training by watching how the missionary models participative Bible studies with non-Christian seekers. Walking alongside local church planters is the first step in cultivating and establishing local leadership.

### **6. Lay leadership**

Church Planting Movements are driven by lay leaders. These lay leaders are typically bivocational and come from the general profile of the people group being reached. In other words, if the people group is primarily nonliterate, then the leadership shares this characteristic. If the people are primarily fishermen, so too are their lay leaders. As the movement unfolds, paid clergy often emerge. However, the majority—and growth edge of the movement—continue to be led by lay or bi-vocational leaders. This reliance upon lay leadership ensures the largest possible pool of potential church planters and cell church leaders. Dependence upon seminary-trained—or in nonliterate societies, even educated—pastoral leaders means that the work will always face a leadership deficit.

### **7. Cell or house churches**

Church buildings do appear in Church Planting Movements. However, the vast majority of the churches continue to be small, reproducible cell churches of 10-30 members meeting in homes or storefronts.

There is a distinction between cell churches and house churches. Cell churches are linked to one another in some type of structured network. Often this network is linked to a larger, single church identity. The Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, South Korea, is perhaps the most famous example of the cell-church model with more than 50,000 individual cells.

House churches may look the same as cell churches, but they generally are not organized under a single authority or hierarchy of authorities. As autonomous units, house churches may lack the unifying structure of cell churches, but they are typically more dynamic. Each has its advantages. Cell groups are easier to shape and guide toward doctrinal conformity, while house churches are less vulnerable to suppression by a hostile government. Both types of churches are common in Church Planting Movements, often appearing in the same movement.

### **8. Churches planting churches**

In most Church Planting Movements, the first churches were planted by missionaries or by missionary-trained church planters. At some point, however, as the movements entered a multiplicative phase of reproduction, the churches themselves began planting new churches. In order for this to occur, church members have to believe that reproduction is natural and that no external aids are needed to start a new church. In Church Planting Movements, nothing deters the local believers from winning the lost and planting new cell churches themselves.

### **9. Rapid reproduction**

Some have challenged the necessity of rapid reproduction for the life of the Church Planting Movement, but no one has questioned its evidence in every CPM. Most church planters involved in these movements contend that rapid reproduction is vital to the movement itself. They report that when reproduction rates slow down, the Church Planting Movement falters. Rapid reproduction communicates the urgency and importance of coming to faith in Christ. When rapid reproduction is taking place, you can be assured that the churches are unencumbered by nonessential elements and the laity are fully empowered to participate in this work of God.

### **10. Healthy churches**

Church growth experts have written extensively in recent years about the marks of a church. Most agree that healthy churches should carry out the following five purposes: 1) worship, 2) evangelistic and missionary outreach, 3) education and discipleship, 4) ministry and 5) fellowship. In each of the Church Planting Movements we studied, these five core functions were evident.

A number of church planters have pointed out that when these five health indicators are strong, the church can't help but grow. More could be said about each of these healthy church indicators, but the most significant one, from a missionary vantage point, is the church's missionary outreach. This impulse within these CPM-oriented churches is extending the gospel into remote people groups and overcoming barriers that have long resisted Western missionary efforts.

## **4 TEN COMMON FACTORS**

Beyond the 10 universal elements found in every Church Planting Movement, there are at least 10 frequently, though not universally, found characteristics. These are not listed in any particular order of priority or frequency. In most CPMs, however, we are seeing most if not all of these factors.

### **1. Worship in the heart language**

There are cases in which God's Word has not yet been translated into the heart language of the people and worship is conducted in a trade language. Even in those rare instances, though, the heart language of the people emerges in their prayers, songs, sermon illustrations and applications. Worship in the common heart language keeps it accessible and within reach of all members of the community and allows everyone to participate in a new church's formation. Missionaries who identify and embrace the heart language of the people they are trying to reach are well positioned to stimulate a Church Planting Movement. Nothing reveals a people group's worldview as much as an intimate knowledge of their heart language. Missionaries who choose to work through a trade language begin their ministry with a curtain between themselves and the hearts of the people they are seeking to reach.

### **2. Evangelism has communal implications**

Unlike the predominant pattern in the West with its emphasis on individualism and personal commitment, Church Planting Movements typically rely on a much stronger family and social connection. Missionaries in CPMs have recognized this and urged new believers to follow the web of their own family relationships to draw new believers into the community of faith (see Acts 16:31-32). In many cases, the churches come to consist of family units and are led by the family's head.

### **3. Rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church**

In most Church Planting Movements, baptism is not delayed by lengthy discipleship requirements. On the contrary, discipleship typically precedes conversion and continues indefinitely. Even when baptisms are delayed, new believers are expected to become witnesses immediately; these new disciples immediately become disciplers of others and even church planters. One elderly man who came to Christ in a Church Planting Movement in India planted 42 churches in his first year as a believer. In an effort to keep the movement growing outward, CPM-oriented missionaries typically encourage new believers to join or help start new churches, rather than simply adding larger numbers to existing congregations.

### **4. Passion and fearlessness**

Church planting movements are characterized by passion and a sense of urgency that attests to the importance of salvation and the necessity of conversion. New believers exhibit a boldness in the face of opposition. A spirit of timidity or fear quenches a CPM. Boldness may invite persecution, but it fuels a Church Planting Movement (see Joshua 1:6).