Training Church Planters

The normative Biblical method of evangelism is through the incarnational ministry of a local church. If we are to see God ***"filling the earth*** (the Muslim World) ***with His glory"*** then our evangelism and discipleship must be such that it will result in rapidly reproducing communities of believers.

Donald McGavran said, *"The essential task in a world where three quarters of all men and women have yet to believe in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour is that of planting new churches."* [1].

In the last two decades many approaches have been developed for training church planters such as: cell group formation training, field-based seminars for tentmakers, graduate courses in seminaries etc. The results have been mixed. Many groups of new believers have remained immature or for some reason they remain 'mule churches' unable to reproduce themselves. David Garrison has urged us to pray and work towards 'church planting movements'.

In order to initiate 'church planting movements among Muslim peoples', there must be some sort of training and preparation of people able to understand and catalyse all the dynamics of a rapidly expanding church planting movement.

Church history demonstrates that rapidly spreading church planting movements are a result of Spirit-motivated leaders who have the ability to form semi-independent churches out of a diverse mixture of believers. They can then model leadership, select and train emerging leaders and instil in them the vision, skills and motivation to 'do it again'. This happened in the Great Evangelical Awakening in England in the 18th century. It happened in Manchuria and Korea in 1907. It is happening in Algeria today.

I would like to focus on how to prepare and train church planters who start a church with the goal of seeing that church produce other churches. These church planters may be ex-pat workers, but more importantly we should be training indigenous MBBs.

1. Five Basic Assumptions for Training

1.1 Training by itself does not produce leaders.

It is God who directs and supervises the development of leaders and He does this through the disciplining work of life experiences. (Heb. 12:5-11) Training is one of the means God may use. **Training is "technical"** – not "whole life". **It produces skills that are repeatable in a given situation.** But life often consists of a whole lot of unpredictable situations! So God uses the training we give in a very broad sense – both formal and informal. So training does not, in itself, produce leaders of CPMs.

But training can **enhance** the growth of a leader who wants to grow in terms of:

- desired knowledge
- desired characteristics
- desired skills

1.2 God wants development in all of us.

We are created in the image of God and so we have tremendous potential for good. Even though we are fallen and hopelessly bankrupt spiritually, God's redemption of us has set in process an incremental journey that will develop Christlikeness in us. This gives us terrific hope that God is transforming us and that **we can** help in transforming the world.

Training tends to see this incremental process as growth in stages or as a series of phases. Training is to help people identify and pass milestones along the road of life that represent how God has changed us. Training should be holistic or better, integrative. In other words it should link all aspects of life – spiritual, emotional, social, physical, economic etc. These all influence and interact with one another.

1.3 We should teach <u>principles</u> that apply universally and interculturally in the formation of church leaders.

Learning is a matter of growing. We would maintain that this is true in all cultures. The experiences and style of learning may be different. Specific curriculum design may be very different because the means of learning is different in different cultures.

A culture-independent view of learning	**A typical western view of learning**
• Learning is a matter of growing.	• Learning is a matter of grasping the facts and gaining knowledge
• Learning depends on experience.	• Learning depends on teaching and the teacher.
• Teaching is a matter of sharing.	• Teaching is a matter of leading those being taught.
• The emphasis is on **being**.	• The emphasis is on **knowing**.

A Biblical (and I think universal) set of **principles** supports this culture-independent view of learning. Some of these are:

- **Experiential real-life learning**

  Jesus called His disciples to be with Him – watching Him, helping Him, being sent out into ministry, being in retreats. They were being trained and equipped for their future ministry. (Mk. 3:13-15)

- **Learning as a process**

  Jesus taught in parables for people at different stages of understanding. Teaching in parables was a sifting mechanism. But this is an anticipation of the teaching implications of different stages of growth.

- **Evaluation of learning**

  In Mt. 23:1-12 where there are seven 'woes' to the Pharisees, you can see at least six principles of learning:

  - The integration of knowing and doing – v.3
  - People are to be helped to identify their own needs and should participate in goal setting – v.4
  - Teachers show by example and by teaching the value of doing nothing for self-glorification – v.5
  - Traditions and symbols are to be evaluated against a criterion of servanthood – v.11
  - Access to resources is to be equally shared – v.8
  - The teaching environment is to reflect the unity of the community – v.8-10

- **The focus is on growth:** Paul uses teaching principles to bring believers to maturity.
    - In Ephesus he teaches while he works. He combines ministry with reflection. He uses colleagues as trainers. (Acts 19)
    - As a trainer Paul demonstrates his concern for content. (see Ephesians)
    - He facilitates those he is training. (1 Timothy)
    - He identifies with fellow learners in their learning journey. (1 & 2 Timothy)

1.4 The standards that define Christian leadership are in the Bible.

These standards for leaders and trainers define the content of leadership training and become the basis for evaluation. Being a Christian leader/trainer means showing the qualities specified in Scripture, but it doesn't mean that the leadership style is expressed in the same way in every culture. Style is culture-specific.

1.5 Church planter training is focused towards adults.

The assumptions of adult education should be used in training. These are:

- The aim is to move the learning process from dependency on others to being a self-directed person. [There will always be dependency on God.]
- They will build a growing reservoir of experiences that become a rich resource for learning.
- Their readiness to learn is determined by the developmental tasks of their roles in life.
- Their time perspective changes from one of postponing application of the knowledge they are gaining till some indeterminate time in the future to an immediacy of application.
- Their orientation to learning shifts from subject-centeredness to performance-centeredness'

2. Building a Training Curriculum round competency

The objective of church planter training is developing:

- Growth in knowledge
- Maturity in character
- Competency in ministry skills

The training curriculum should include the development of the whole person – their affective part – their understanding – their character – their skills.

Competency based learning is influenced by four forces:

a) The purpose of the training is not to increase knowledge but to produce people competent in certain skills.

b) The focus is on learning instead of on teaching.

c) The aim is to introduce patterns/habits of life-long learning.

d) There is a concern to develop new ways of delivering learning resources – such as to oral preference learners.

The training method most familiar to us is the content transmission model. Here the key is the subject matter. Competency-based learning for church planters poses a number of basic questions.

2.1 What competencies should church planters possess?

This question focuses on the students' hoped-for **outcomes**. Research must be done to develop a list of competencies. Looking at the differences between competent and not-so-competent church planters will do this.

2.2 What knowledge, skills and attitudes do the church planter trainers currently possess?

All trainees have already formed ideas and gained experience (formally or informally) about 'church' and how to start one. How can we correct any negative stereotypes and experiences and build on all the positive experiences? It is important to do an assessment of the trainees' strengths and weaknesses regarding their perceptions of 'church'. This should happen at the beginning of the training.

2.3 How can the church planting trainees participate in experiences (learning activities) that contribute to high levels of competency in CP?

This may involve:

- A 'learning contract'
- coaching /mentoring
- modular courses of training

2.4 How will we know when the church planters have changed in newer and deeper understandings, a deepened character, changed attitudes as needed and sharpened skills?

3. Developing competency profiles

We need to articulate clearly the competencies required by church planters. They are clearly called to be certain kinds of people and they need to do specific tasks at some pre-determined level of proficiency. These specific traits and abilities then become the core of the training system. If we get the core wrong then we become very vulnerable. These competency profiles need to be constantly reviewed and upgraded to make sure they are comprehensive and cover many different cultures.

4. Diagnosing the needs of trainees

As a trainee enters the training programme his/her current competencies must be identified and compared to the competency profile to assess what needs to be learned and what needs to change. In other words, how wide is the gap between present potential performance and that required for effective competency in church planting.

This is best done by **self-diagnosis**, as this will produce a greater motivation to learn. So the trainee and the facilitators need to work together to discover where the trainee is in the 'be and do' continuum. This will probably happen through open-ended interviews, questionnaires, group problem solving sessions and even pen and paper tests. Tools must be developed to facilitate this.

5. Designing individualised training strategies

In training the teacher normally gives out knowledge at the rate of absorption of the average student with no provision made for slower or faster students. There is also an assumption that all start with the same level of knowledge. This is rarely true.

In competency-based learning the responsibility is placed on the learner to initiate learning by using the facilitator/trainer as a resource person. A **'learning contract'** is developed between the trainee and the facilitator so there is some structure in learning.

The contract allows the trainee to set his/her own objectives, to identify resources and strategies that take into account different styles of learning and to establish ways they can judge the evidence to show they have accomplished their objectives.[3] Learning contracts work well in westernised/individualised cultures.

In group-oriented cultures training is best done in community learning. Seminars are prepared to focus on a single issue in the list of required church planter competencies. The instructional objectives are to help each member of the group to become a certain sort of person and/or to do a specific task in church planting. The seminar will include case studies, role-play, talks, discussions and exercises. Assignments may include projects, reading, apprenticeships etc.

6. Evaluating change in the learners

Feedback and evaluation are essential for the whole programme. Evaluating procedures is essential to discover if objectives are being met and to check the appropriateness of the learning experiences. Information gathered by feedback is then used to help individuals uncover issues, identify directions and provide advice.

7. Developing a model for training ex-pat workers in the Muslim World to be competent church planters

7.1 Developing specific roles in church planting

We probably need to develop four distinct roles:

- **A facilitating role**: at least part of the time he/she is involved in training church planters – ex-pat. or MBBs.
- **A pioneer role**: an individual or a team who moves into a region/city where there is no church. They plant one and hopefully see it begin to multiply.
- **A problem-solving catalytic role**: this person helps a church that is not growing or multiplying (a mule church). He/she may also develop a young church that is facing obstacles that need creative solutions.
- **A resource-linking role**: This person is a resource to the other three above providing support services and materials etc.

7.2 Developing an ethos of training church planters for the Muslim World

Principles of this ethos:

- **Life-related** and meaningful to the perceived needs of the church planter.
- **Individualised** – each church planter should learn at his/her own pace in incremental steps. This produces motivated learners. Self-assessment of the learning process needs to be done.
- **Comprehensive** – it should cover what church planters believe, do, think and feel in order to produce a high level of competency.
- **Oriented to content ⟶ experience ⟶ reflection**. Information and understanding should lead to practice (actual ministry experience) and this should be followed by reflection, analysis and evaluation of that experience leading to feedback into the content of the training.

7.3 Developing a Training System

- **Vision casting and shaping**

  Opportunities need to be taken to develop this at study events.

- Networking to speak about church planting and share case studies etc.
- Church planting conferences where those interested can get together and share with one another
- Having available leaflets, digital and other promotional material

- **Regular training events**
  - Seminars
  - Training weeks
  - A system of internship on other teams/Fields for limited periods of time
- **Self study curriculum**
  - Learning contracts and mentors
  - A church planting curriculum in modules covering:
    - What to do before you start
    - Basic orientation, team matters, language learning, cultural acquisition etc.
    - Means and methods of evangelism
    - Initial discipleship
    - Core group formation
    - Indigenous leadership development
    - Multiplying churches
    - Expatriate withdrawal

All these components need periodic evaluation and up grading. A **discrepancy analysis** of the self-rating of the worker should be done. This should probably also be done by his/her team leader. This will help in prioritising the skills that need to be developed.

8. Conclusion

I believe that the Muslim World will be reached/evangelised by a rapid multiplication of healthy churches. We have the evidence for this among the Kabyle in Algeria, in Iran, in Bangladesh and in Java. We need to ask the Lord for more church planters. (Mt. 9:37-38) We need to develop the church planters we do have – both expatriate and MBBs – until we see church planting movements everywhere.

NOTES

1. Hesslegrave, David, **Planting Churches Cross-Culturally**, Baker House Books 1980 p. 7
2. Knowles, Malcolm S, **The Modern Practice of Adult Education** 1980 pp. 44-45
3. Knowles, Malcolm S, **Using Learning Contracts** 1986