



MISSION SPOKANE

THE WHOLE CITY TRANSFORMED BY THE WHOLE GOSPEL THROUGH THE WHOLE CHURCH



CHURCH PLANTING MINISTRY

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Let's Stop Planting Sterile Churches!

by Carol Davis

Carol Davis is a woman who has been involved in church planting since her childhood. What she has learned from the mistakes and the successes can help us all.

"I have a question I've been wanting to ask you for four years," I said to Charles Brock, author of Practicing Principles of Indigenous Church Planting, when I met in the Philippines a few years ago. "You go into the poor areas of Manila, you plant churches rapidly, they always produce their own leadership, they are never dependent on outside funds and they always reproduce.

"I know two other brothers who plant churches in the same areas and it takes them six or seven years. They are always dependent, they never reproduce and they never can produce their own leadership. They say poverty has destroyed the psyche of the people and they are not leadership quality.

"I want to know why you can do it and they can't."

The question was a burning one, because I have been involved in planting churches for as long as I can remember, but not with the speed and rapid reproduction that I saw in Brock's ministry.

Sick, dead or sterile

Growing up, I remember there were few evangelical churches on the West coast of the United States when my family moved there in the early 40s. Our little church of about 85 began to start churches in the Fresno area and later in Sacramento.

My dad would take the family to the new church start where we would stay for a year or so. When it was up and going, we would go back to the mother church and move out from there to the next

church start. I returned to that area as an adult nine years later, but I couldn't find all those churches in our association of churches. I wondered where they were.

Now I have a very simple mind. I knew that anything that was alive was reproducing. It is a natural thing for trees and plants to drop their seeds and spontaneously spring up. We don't try to have babies, we try to not have babies. In fact, if an organism does not reproduce, we say it is sick, dead or sterile.

I finally concluded that we had planted sterile churches, churches that were not church-starting churches. I studied and surveyed four cities on the West coast and found the same phenomenon. A mother church would go into an area and in a period of 12 to 15 years would plant other churches. But few of those new churches would ever plant another one.

What we found is that people in America either consider it optional to plant a church or they consider it a two-step process. "We're going to grow and we're going to train ourselves and get equipped and then we are going to do the reproduction." But those in the two-step process usually have been there for years, and I'm not sure if they will ever get to a place where they are going to reproduce.

That began to drive a lot of questions in my own heart and mind, questions that began to be answered when I talked with Charles Brock in Manila.

'The person of peace'

He said there are two things that make rapid planting and reproduction possible. First of all, he would find the "person of peace." "I always wait for the element of the miraculous in every work I start," he explained. "One day I thought that a church needed to be started in an area. On my way out there I saw this woman in a second floor window. I didn't think a thing about it. When I came back an hour later she was still in the second floor window.

"Just as I got past her on my motor bike she called out to me, 'Sir, are you a Bible man?' I said, 'Well, I teach the Bible.' She asked, 'Would you teach me and my family?'

"I had thought the other area was where I was supposed to go, but it wasn't. It was here, because God had prepared it."

Jesus told his disciples as they went out, "Whatever house you enter first say 'Peace be to this house' and if a man of peace (or person of peace) is there, your peace will rest upon him.... stay in that house eating and drinking whatever they give you....Do not keep moving from house to house."

There are reasons for Jesus' instructions. If God has sent us, and we are on his wavelength, there are people he has ready. They're the people he has intended for the core of the starting of that church.

This special person he has prepared he would call a "person of peace." Most of the time pastors, small group leaders and church planters stop before they find this person. You therefore get a slow church start and it's not necessarily very spontaneous.

The authentic witness

There is no verse that describes what the person of peace looks like. But what we can do is look at people of peace, see where God did a work and then begin to see what the common threads were. Lydia was one.

Cornelius was one. The demoniac was one. The woman at the well was one. There were others.

Once you begin to look, you will see that they have these three marks:

- They are receptive. Not every receptive person is a person of peace. There will be many people along the way who receive Christ before you have found this person. But every person of peace is receptive.
- They are a person of reputation. They are known. They may have a good or a bad reputation. But they are known. The woman at the well had a bad reputation. Cornelius' reputation was good.
- They have influence. They are a person who, when they respond to Christ, will bring many others along with them.

When Jesus came to one town, a demoniac was crying out in the caves. Jesus cast the demons out, put them in pigs, the pigs went over a cliff and the whole town wanted Jesus out.

Later we find Jesus coming back to this same region where he had been thrown out, and now everyone wants him. The only difference between those two scenes is that now a cleansed demoniac is living among them, a transformed life that demonstrates every day the power of God to change a life.

It is a very powerful thing once you see it. It becomes the authentic witness of who Christ is and what he can do. So when you are going, you are looking for this certain kind of person. When you find him, you will have a neat church start. You will stay there and go through his circle of influence.

Not one, but 200

Paul and Silas referred to that circle of influence when they told the Philippian jailor to "believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." Anthropologists tell us that in every culture in every age you have four relationships: family, neighbors, co-workers, friends. So when we find this person of peace, he has family, neighbors, co-workers and friends that are going to be impacted by his decision.

They tell us that most people in a healthy society in the West have 25-30 that are really quite close. So I can know when I find a person with influence I'm probably immediately impacting at least 200 people. I don't see one person anymore. I see 200.

What is exciting is that this is the precision way to start a church. Precision to go in and find that person of peace. Then you are connecting with what God is already doing.

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Contact info: Servant Leaders Team e-mail and phone numbers

Mission Spokane Mailing List/Updates

Mission Spokane offers periodic email updates for those interested in the transformation of Spokane, Washington and the Inland Northwest USA. To subscribe to the Mission Spokane Updates emailinglist, simply

send an email to missionspokaneupdates-subscribe@myinjesus.com

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Look to the one-week-old Christian

The second thing Charles told me was, "I never do anything that a one-week-old Christian can't do. If I preached like I did in my home church they would think they couldn't carry the gospel until they had my skills, my abilities, my training. If I prayed like I did in my home church they would think they couldn't talk with God until they had words and phrases like mine. I don't bring a worship leader because if I did they would think they couldn't worship God until they had someone trained."

"Everything they see me do, they can do. Sometimes I don't get back to the area for several weeks. But since they didn't know they couldn't do it, they went and told their cousin in another area and they already had another group started."

That's simplicity. We have made things so complex and required so much training. It has to be indigenous.

'Growth' vs. 'reproduction'

I want to show you the difference between what I call a "growth culture" in which we've all been trained and a "reproduction model." Because I believe to plant a church is a different animal than to plant a church-planting church. In fact, I'm convinced that the skill sets we learned in ministry training will actually insure that things don't reproduce.

In our growth culture we've learned to focus on individual conversions, while a reproduction model focuses on group conversions.

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We've started on believer's turf. But in order to reproduce, we must start on unbeliever's turf. If we want group conversions of family members, co-workers, neighbors and friends, those people are not going to come to a stranger's house or into the strange setting of a church. They will come to turf where they are always involved. In our culture we teach Scripture for information. With the reproductive model it is taught for application, so that people are watching the power of God.

We've begun by finding Christians. But if you want a really powerful church start, find people of peace. Bar the Christians; don't let them in. They mess things up in the early stages.

We've begun in facilities. This takes money and expertise, which are not readily available. If you begin in homes or front porches or yards or parks, there are always more of them.

We've tended to start with celebration in a large group. For reproduction you start with a small group. Very few people actually have the ability and gifts to do a large group well. It takes more expertise, more preparation, more everything. A lot of people can facilitate small groups. They were already doing it in their own natural network before they were saved.

We build programs and buildings. To reproduce, you build leaders.

Leadership is also different. Traditionally we import professional clergy. But what we need for reproduction is to have indigenous and convert-emerging clergy. Where are the future pastors for this setting? They are in the streets, they are beating their wives, they are ripping off their employers.

Also, the leader tends to see himself as the leader for all the participants. In a reproducing church, the leader is the equipper for the emerging leaders. That is how they see themselves, and that is how they stay focused. We are used to funding the church starter. But for churches that will start other churches, you need to have bi-vocational church starters. If we are going to see the cities reached, it is going to be with bi-vocational people. Otherwise, it takes too long to actually fund.

In my own experience, every time we got ready to plant a church we felt like we couldn't afford to lose those people, their tithes and all that. But every time we did, we actually didn't skip a beat. God supplied. I found the most powerful thing is that connection with another church who cares.

In fact, in every church that I see planting churches, I find that some of their own issues begin to dissolve. I don't know what it is. They are giving themselves away. I am convinced you cannot out-give God. The more you give, the more God does.

Growth culture

Reproductive model

Focus on individual conversions	Focus on group conversions
Start on believer's turf	Start on unbeliever's turf
Teach Scripture for information	Teach Scripture for application
Begin by finding Christians	Begin by finding "people of peace"
Begin in facilities	Begin in homes, front porches, yards, parks
Start with celebration in a large group	Start with a small group
Build programs and buildings	Build leaders
Import professional clergy	Have indigenous and convert-emerging clergy
Leader leads all the participants	Leader equips the emerging leaders
Fund the church starter	Start churches with bi-vocational people

Adapted for the DAWN Report (<http://www.dawnministries.org/index.html>) from an address given at the World Impact (<http://www.worldimpact.org/events/crownorder.html>) Crowns of Beauty Conference, Feb., 1999. More materials from Carol Davis/Global Spectrum are available at intent@aol.com.

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