

## Apostolic Church Planters



If launching a locally sustainable, reproducing church-planting movement is the goal, as laid out thus far, very different approaches must be adopted.[1] Perhaps most central will be a new understanding of the role of church planters. They will need to take an approach much closer to that of Paul's band of missionaries in the New Testament, what we call *apostolic church planting*. The term *apostle* is used in various ways in the New Testament, most prominently in reference to the twelve apostles who were personally called and commissioned by Jesus and to the apostle Paul, who also occupied a unique authoritative role in the first-century church. But the term is also used more generally in reference to some of Paul's coworkers who were part of his itinerant missionary band, including Barnabas (Acts 14:3, 14), Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6, 9), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy (1 Thess. 2:6; cf. 1:1).[2] Moreover, apostleship is referred to as an ongoing spiritual gift, to be desired in the church (1 Cor. 12:28–31). Thus the term *apostle* can be considered a rough equivalent to *missionary* (see discussion in Ott and Strauss 2010, 230–36). By “apostolic church planting,” then, we mean church planting that follows the apostolic model

of developing, empowering, and releasing local believers for ministry and mission from the very beginning. The planters' role in the local church plant is temporary. They resist the temptation to plant the church in a way that makes it dependent on their gifts and resources.

## **Three Types of Church Planters**

Essentially three types of church planters, corresponding to three broad approaches to church planting, can be identified: the pastoral church planter, the catalytic church planter, and the apostolic church planter.<sup>[3]</sup> Each has a different understanding of the church planter's role, will invest his or her time and energies differently, is faced with particular opportunities and challenges, is suited for a particular situation, and will have an effect on the likelihood that the church plant becomes a reproducing church (an overview is given in table 5.1).

Though the apostolic approach to church planting is not necessarily the best approach in every setting, it is the approach that has been most often blessed by God in launching locally sustainable and reproducing church-planting movements. Unfortunately most Western church planters have never observed it, were not trained in it, and thus hardly consider it as an alternative to the way they have seen churches planted in their home context. Even cross-cultural church planters tend to assume that apart from a few cultural adjustments they should plant churches as they have been planted in their home culture. But this will seldom lead to indigenous church multiplication.

## ***The Pastoral Church Planter***

The goal of the pastoral church planter is quite simply to begin a new church and pastor it. In the case of missionary church planters, normally the hope is that the church will soon be able to call and pay its own national pastor and the missionary can move on to plant another church. The method is straightforward: Initially evangelistic efforts are necessary to gather a congregation of new believers. But once a core of believers has been gathered, often quite small, the pastoral church planter tends to shift into the pastoral care—giving mode, focusing energy on preaching, teaching, counseling, and various other pastoral duties. If a church-planting team is involved, the team members assume roles similar to those in a multistaff church. Often the church planter simply stays indefinitely as pastor of the church. If the church planter is a cross-cultural missionary, the church is considered “planted” when it can call and pay a national pastor to replace the missionary.

In many parts of the world this is the most familiar and common variety of church planter. Most church planters, including missionaries, simply aren’t aware of any other approach. Most seminaries train pastors, not evangelists or church planters; thus most seminary-trained church planters feel comfortable with this role. Western books on church planting assume this method. It is the model of ministry adopted in many, if not most, denominations internationally.

**Table 5.1**  
**Three Types of Church Planters**

|             | <b>Pastoral Church Planter</b>  | <b>Catalytic Church Planter</b>   | <b>Apostolic Church Planter</b>  |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| Goal        | To plant the church and pastor it until it is large enough to call and pay its own pastor                                     | To plant a church that will become the catalyst for mothering many other churches and launching a movement  | To multiply churches that are not dependent on the church planter or outside resources   |
| Method      | The church planter serves as pastor; missionary church planters usually move on after the church has called a national pastor | The church planter plants a large, strong church and then remains as pastor or resource person to facilitate the planting of multiple daughter churches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The church planter serves as equippier rather than as pastor, training and delegating ministry to nationals</li> <li>• The church planter moves on quickly, leaving ministry in the hands of local leaders</li> </ul> |
| Assumptions | A church is established only when it can call and pay its own pastor  | Under the right leadership a strategically located church can multiply daughter churches  | Local lay believers can be equipped to provide their own pastoral leadership and multiply churches   |
| Application | Suited for areas of moderate church growth, relative affluence, and   | Suited for moderately responsive urban areas with potential   | Suited for most localities, especially areas with rapid  |

|            | available trained<br>pastors   | for multiple daughter<br>churches  | church growth and<br>rural settings   |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Strengths  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High quality of ministry by well-trained leaders</li> <li>• Long-term relationships in church and community</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates church reproduction</li> <li>• Networking among the new churches</li> <li>• Long-term relationships in the region</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates church multiplication</li> <li>• Promotes lay ownership and ministry</li> <li>• Free from dependency on outside resources</li> </ul>   |
| Weaknesses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rarely leads to church multiplication</li> <li>• The church planter stays too long at one location</li> <li>• Failure to mobilize the laity and dependency on professionals and outside resources</li> <li>• Rapid church-planting movements can be hampered</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church planter must be exceptionally gifted</li> <li>• Not all church plants will grow or become strong enough to mother many churches</li> <li>• Dependent on the gifts of the church planter; reproduction may cease with the departure of the church planter</li> <li>• The church reproduces but seldom multiplies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress is initially slower</li> <li>• Local believers are not always willing or capable to lead</li> <li>• Lay leadership may be weak or poorly trained</li> <li>• Most church planters are not trained in this method</li> <li>• Church planter may need to change location often•</li> </ul> |
| Examples   | Most Western church planters   | Rick Warren, Bob Roberts   | Tom Steffen, George Patterson   |

The members of the church plant often expect this of the

church planter: “Be our pastor! That’s what you are trained and paid for.” Because church planters usually have more training and more time than lay church members, it is only natural that the planter bears the load of pastoral ministry. This problem is all the more aggravated if several full-time planters are serving in the same church plant on a team. The strengths of this approach are that the church plant has strong and expert pastoral care, that the local leaders can be developed over an extended period, and that the teaching is solid.

This approach to church planting works well under three conditions: (1) high potential for church growth, either because the people are responsive to evangelism or through the transfer of those who are already believers; (2) affluence, where the new church can finance its own pastor with relatively few members; and (3) the presence of trained national believers available to be called as pastor to replace the church planter. These conditions are present in much of North America; thus the pastoral approach has been generally successful there.

Unfortunately, these conditions are absent from most places where cross-cultural or pioneer church planting among unreached people is done. If church growth is slow and local resources are limited, the new church will have difficulty calling and paying a replacement for the missionary church planter. The longer the church planter remains in this role, the more the church becomes dependent on him. Sometimes a missionary church planter remains faithfully at the location for ten or even twenty years, hoping that one day a national pastor can be called to replace him or her. Usually frustration sets in sooner. The only solution appears to be for the mission to financially

subsidize the calling of a national pastor—if one can be found—so that the missionary can finally move on. This only continues the dependency, which is increasingly difficult to break. Multiplication of such churches is very difficult and rare.

George Patterson warns that when the focus is on quickly starting church services with a Sunday sermon led by a missionary, the danger is establishing “preaching points” rather than New Testament churches. He writes, “Perhaps as many as 90% of church planting missionaries start preaching points with the hope that they will somehow evolve into a church. It does not happen except by the grace of God, if He’s merciful. Preaching points tend to perpetuate themselves” (1981, 603). Our observations confirm this.

Furthermore, church plants that are planted and pastored by an expatriate often feel foreign to nationals, at least at first. Later, the transition from missionary pastor to national pastor can be difficult because the church has become accustomed to the foreign leadership style of the missionary. The transition will be all the more aggravated if the church planter is more educated than the national pastor.

One key conviction that underlies the pastoral church planter’s self-understanding is that a church must have a fully paid, expertly trained pastor to be considered a legitimate, planted church. For sure, such a paid pastor is desirable in many situations, but a paid pastor is certainly not a biblical *requirement* for being considered an established church. The churches that Paul planted were virtually all lay led and had multiple elders. Indeed mission history up to our own day has demonstrated time and again that the most dynamic church-

planting movements were lay led and not encumbered by the “how can we pay a pastor” dilemma. David Garrison (2000, 35) identifies local lay leadership, usually bivocational pastors, as one of the ten elements that rapidly growing church-planting movements around the world have in common. Only as the movement matures do paid clergy emerge.

Because the pastoral church planter assumes that one day a professionally trained pastor will replace him or her, minimal effort is invested in training and empowering the laity for genuine pastoral ministry. Furthermore, believers in the church plant can become “spoiled” by having a full-time pastor or even a whole team of fully paid workers on a church-planting team. The church planter-pastor has set a professional standard that is difficult to follow. Nationals may feel inferior because they believe that they cannot minister as well as the planter, and they fear that the church cannot survive without a highly trained, paid pastor. This thinking is perhaps the single most *unnecessary* hindrance to church planting and multiplication in most parts of the world today. Not only are missionary resources tied up at one location for many years, but a professional attitude toward ministry is instilled, which inhibits full mobilization of local lay believers and ultimately church reproduction.

## *The Catalytic Church Planter*

A second church planter role is the catalytic church planter. A catalyst creates or effects a chemical reaction among other elements. The potential for reaction was latently present, but the catalyst sets it in motion. The catalytic church planter plants a church and remains as pastor in that church or serves as a resource person in the region to become a catalyst or facilitator for church reproduction. Considerable energy and resources are usually invested in establishing and strengthening the initial church plant with the goal that it will become a launching base for numerous additional church plants in the region. Like pastoral church planters, the catalytic planter may remain in a pastoral role in the initial church plant. But catalytic church planters differ from pastoral church planters in that they have not only the vision for church reproduction but also the ability and a strategy to realize that vision. Rather than focusing their energy on pastoral care and growth of the congregation, their energy is devoted largely to equipping, motivating, and releasing workers for church multiplication. They are not satisfied with planting one church and perhaps moving on to plant another—that is, church addition. They are committed to launching an entire movement out of the initial church plant, mobilizing multiple church-planting teams.

As we will describe in chapter 7, the mother-daughter or hiving-off approach is among the most effective methods for rapid church reproduction, and in North America multisite churches have become a way to reproduce churches. Such movements, however, rarely develop apart from catalytic

leadership—leaders who not only have the vision but also are able to motivate and mobilize others for church reproduction. Once most church plants become established, energy shifts to caregiving and maintenance. Catalytic church planters provide the visionary leadership necessary to move the church out of its comfort zone so it can take steps of faith toward reproduction. Ideally a national pastor or laypersons should provide such leadership, but there can be a place for an exceptionally gifted cross-cultural church planter to play this catalytic role.

Catalytic church planters often work in urban areas, where the potential for planting daughter churches is great. For example, Rick Warren pioneered the planting of the Saddleback Valley Community Church. Though Warren did not leave his church to plant or pastor any of the daughter churches, under his leadership Saddleback went on to plant twenty-six new churches during the first twenty years. He was a significant catalyst used by God to ignite that reproduction of churches. Ron Sylvia planted the Church @ The Springs in Ocala, Florida, in 1995, and by 2006 it had planted ten new churches while itself growing from twenty-one to three thousand people (Sylvia 2006). Northwood Church, near Fort Worth, Texas, led by catalytic church planter Bob Roberts Jr., claims to have been instrumental in planting one hundred new churches! Roberts has discovered that a key to achieving church reproduction is to recruit and train up an army of new church planters. Like several other reproducing churches, Northwood has established its own church planter training program based in the mother church to raise up well-prepared church planters

(see Roberts 2008). For an example of a catalytic church planter in Venezuela, see case study 5.1.

Such catalytic church planters are rare among nationals and even rarer among cross-cultural church planters because exceptional gifts are necessary to mobilize and sustain such a movement. Perhaps the greatest weakness of this model is the likelihood that a church planter would overestimate his or her ability to provide this kind of leadership, investing much time and energy in a single church plant while failing to actually reproduce churches. Furthermore, the church-planting movement may become very dependent on the ministry of the catalytic leader, which often ceases when that person departs. The catalytic church planter will rely on the recruiting and training of other church planters to lead the new churches. Finally, because catalytic movements are usually dependent on the gifted and visionary leadership of a planter in the mother church, the church reproduces but fails to truly multiply: the church plants numerous daughter churches (reproduction), but the daughter churches do not plant their own daughter churches (multiplication). To reach multiplication, a movement cannot be dependent on just a few gifted and visionary leaders but must learn how to mobilize more ordinary leaders for further church planting initiated by the daughter churches.

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### **Case Study 5.1**

#### **Catalytic Church Planting in Venezuela**

Francisco Liévano, pastor of the Dios Admirable Church in Caracas, Venezuela, is a catalytic church planter. He explains the vision he had when he came to the

church after being a seminary professor: “I came with the idea of planting churches. What was I going to do? Just preach and run programs for the church? Yes, I preach and run the programs but I also plant churches!” (quoted in Neumann 1999, 13).

And indeed he has. Within five years, five churches were planted, while at the same time the mother church grew from two hundred to four hundred people! Though the mother church was by no means a megachurch, catalytic pastoral leadership led to *both* the launching of daughter churches *and* the continued growth of the mother church simultaneously.

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A catalytic church planter needn't have the dramatic gifts or success of a Rick Warren or Bob Roberts to be effective. There is much to be said for remaining with a church plant until it has successfully launched its first daughter church and thus setting a pattern of reproduction that can be continued after the church planter's departure. Nor is it necessary that the mother church have thousands of members before it can launch a movement. Even in the moderately resistant cities of Germany, modest church-planting movements have emerged largely through visionary, catalytic leadership in churches with fewer than two hundred members.

An alternate form of the catalytic church planter is when the planter does not remain as the pastor of a reproducing church but becomes the trainer and coach of numerous other church planters. We will explain in chapter 17 how whole movements have been launched by the establishment of church planter training centers. Like the catalytic pastor, the catalytic trainer reproduces himself or herself by developing, encouraging, and mobilizing numerous other church planters who in turn plant numerous churches.

## ***The Apostolic Church Planter***

The approach of the apostolic church planter is radically different from that of pastoral or catalytic church planters. This church planter seeks to follow the model of the apostle Paul, who as far as we know never became the pastor of a church he planted. Instead, after initial evangelism, he focused on empowering the local believers, primarily laypersons, to carry on and expand the work after his departure. His ministry was more itinerate, seeking to plant reproducing churches with local leaders so that he could move on to pioneer work among new unreached peoples. Sometimes local believers would be recruited into Paul's itinerant missionary team, thus instilling vision for global multiplication and mission at the very inception of the young churches. Dependencies were avoided from the outset. With this model, the question "Who will replace the church planter-pastor?" never arises, because the planter never becomes the pastor. Rather he or she has from the start prepared local believers for pastoral leadership, convinced that they are able if provided with adequate teaching and models. This is a key to church multiplication and church planter phase-out.

If people are responsive to the gospel and a church-planting movement begins to develop, the planter may withdraw from directly planting churches altogether, allowing local believers to take initiative. The planter then assumes more the role of trainer, facilitator, and consultant to the movement. If responsiveness is slower, the church planter may phase out of the initial church plant and begin a pioneer work in the region. In this case, he should seek to recruit one or more local

believers from the initial church plant to join him as apprentice church planters in the next church plant, as did Paul.

This approach has been advocated by numerous cross-cultural church-planting practitioners and writers. As early as 1851 Henry Venn, one of the first advocates of the “three-self” (self-propagating, self-governing, self-supporting) definition of church autonomy, argued that “missionaries should be very careful not to become pastors because it would divert them from their real task and would give the native pastors inappropriate European models” (Williams 1990, 6). Roland Allen’s 1927 classic *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* drew attention to the itinerant nature of Paul’s apostolic ministry and his bold empowering and entrusting of local believers to the Holy Spirit as a model for contemporary missionaries.

Glenn Kendall, who was a missionary in Rwanda and part of a rapidly growing church-planting movement, illustrates the difference between pastoral church planters and apostolic church planters in an article provocatively titled “Missionaries Should Not Plant Churches” (1988). He describes a missionary, Bob, who after fifteen years as a church planter in a large city had a small group of about sixty people meeting in a borrowed building. Another missionary, Jeff, had worked only four years in the same city but had already planted two churches and was working on a third church plant.

Bob set out to plant a church and he succeeded, albeit slowly. Because none of his people had training or experience, Bob did almost all of the preaching and

teaching. His people generously affirmed his ministry. They weren't ready to assume his role and he wasn't eager to give it up. He has invested 15 years in this church and he didn't want to release control too soon and risk a failure.

Jeff, on the other hand, facilitated the starting of churches. He motivated and trained people to do it. He wasn't up front every Sunday. He encouraged new Christians and developed leaders from the beginning. He would not start church services unless he had nationals to lead them.

Jeff's ministry expanded as he drew out leaders to take over. Bob's ministry dragged on. He thought it would take another 10 years before he had responsible leaders. (1988, 218–19)

We would call Bob a pastoral church planter and Jeff an apostolic church planter. Kendall goes on to advocate that missionaries aim to be *facilitators* of new churches instead of leaders of them. He attributes multiplication of churches less to the responsiveness of the people per se than to a philosophy of ministry and methods that can promote church multiplication, even among peoples deemed unresponsive.

Kendall even suggests that the church planter work in two or three areas simultaneously, thus reducing dependency and forcing local laypersons to develop their churches and ministries: "Work in two or three areas or ministries at the same time. This really helps to get new churches started, because you will be the advisor, not the king pin. Working two or three places at the same time forces you to be away from them and gives room for national leaders to grow. You will strangle the new leaders unless you build into your plans time to be away" (1988, 221). Tentmaking church planters have an advantage in this regard. Because they are not able to serve the church full time, the church tends to become less dependent on them.

Garrison similarly advocates a facilitating role for the missionary church planter, saying, “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” (2000, 34). He observes that rapidly growing church-planting movements place a high priority on training local lay leaders who provide the pastoral care for the movement churches. One of the ten common factors of rapidly growing church-planting movements is outsiders’ keeping a low profile. The church planter focuses on mentoring new believers behind the scenes. “This crisis of transferring responsibility can be minimized when the missionary shares responsibility from the beginning with those he is leading. A church-planting pattern of modelling new church planting and worship, then assisting the church members in the process of doing the same themselves, helps to pass on the missionary’s expertise to the next generation of local church planters” (Garrison 2000, 44). Training such local leaders on the job (not in seminaries) is also a key to the rapid reproduction of churches. Garrison suggests a “MAWL” approach to training local leaders: “Model, Assist, Watch, and Leave.” To do this the apostolic planter must model various aspects of pastoral ministry, but this is always with a view to equipping others simultaneously and not taking primary or long-term pastoral responsibility. Expatriate church planters will thus still need to learn the local language and culture to be effective. For an example of apostolic church planting in India, see case study 5.2.

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## Case Study 5.2

### The Rashtiya Susmachar Parishad Church-Planting Movement in Uttar Pradesh, India

In 1992 an indigenous Indian mission began missionary efforts in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. The original approach was the "old missionary model": the church planter lived in a town and held services in his home and conducted other meetings. After ten years the effort produced about seven hundred believers in ten fields.

However, in 2002 the strategy was changed and a more apostolic model was adopted. "In the first year the church planter will plant fellowships in ten villages, train a leader for every village fellowship and hand over that fellowship to him. The missionary moves to another ten villages in the following year." Equipping local lay leaders was central to the strategy.

The result was that within one year the number of fellowships grew from 65 to 130 and the number of believers grew to fifteen hundred. Thus, through adoption of the new approach, the accomplishments of ten previous years were more than doubled in twelve months (LOP 43, 2005, 26).

### *Discussion Questions*

1. Why do you think the new strategy was so much more effective?
2. Might similar results also be achieved by such a strategy in other contexts? Why or why not?

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George Patterson, another advocate of the apostolic model, was involved in a church-planting movement in Honduras that planted about one hundred house churches in twenty years. The approach relied heavily on theological education by extension and the in-service training of local leaders (Patterson 1981). Together with Richard Scoggins he has produced the *Church Multiplication Guide* (1993), and with Galen Currah he has developed “Train and Multiply” as a tool to train leaders and plant churches.[4]

Paul Gupta, who trained workers and launched a multiplying church-planting movement in India (see chapter 17), advocated an apostolic approach, which he describes in this way:

Sometimes candidates think that the mission is to start and pastor a church. We make it very clear that a missionary should never become the pastor of a new church plant among an unreached people group. Following the vision of the mission, the team will serve as a catalyst to get the movement started. From the beginning the missionaries must understand that they need to identify gifts in new believers and equip them to do the ministry of the church. (Gupta and Lingenfelter 2006, 64)

From the outset nationals must be trained to do all essential ministries: evangelism, preaching, teaching, counseling,

administration. The church planter must surrender the desire to have “up front” ministry. His or her primary role is behind the scenes, equipping others. The church planter who loves to preach must learn to focus on equipping others to preach; the church planter who is gifted in counseling will need to shift emphasis to empowering others to counsel. The lay sermons will probably not be as homiletically polished or theologically astute as those the missionary could preach. But the reward will be the development of truly empowered local leaders who will serve the church well after the church planter has departed (see case study 5.3). The missionary is constantly working himself or herself out of a job, performing a ministry only so long as necessary to train a national. Indeed, apart from evangelism and initial follow-up, if a national is not available and willing to be trained, the ministry should probably not be initiated. This may make for a slower start but will result, we believe, in a more solid finish for the church plant.

The apostolic church-planting model has several inherent challenges. The apostolic church planter may need to change location frequently, which is difficult for families and inhibits long-term relationships. Few church planters are trained in such an approach, and few are really willing to restrain their ministry or slow the advancement of the church for the sake of developing lay ministers and ownership. There are situations, especially in resistant areas, where local believers just aren't suitable for leadership or are unwilling to bear responsibility. Where new believers are illiterate or nomadic or come from a radically non-Christian worldview, the process of developing leaders and churches may be long and tedious. The early

departure of the missionary may contribute to major problems in the new church, as the apostle Paul experienced with the church in Corinth. Nevertheless, this is the approach that Paul used and that has been used in most rapidly expanding church-planting movements in responsive parts of the world. Our concern is not so much for speed as for locally reproducible methods that in the long run can launch a self-sustaining movement.

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### **Case Study 5.3**

#### **Who will preach Sundays?**

While on a consulting trip, Craig sat in on a meeting of the leaders of a small new church plant in an Eastern European city. They were discussing how they might move from semiweekly to weekly church services. The main obstacle was the lack of a preacher for the additional services. The language skills and background of the missionary made it impossible for him to preach on more than two Sundays a month. The initial response of the group was to request from the mission agency another missionary or to look for other outside resources to meet the need. As they began to brainstorm the alternatives, it became apparent that several of the lay leaders would preach if the missionary were to assist them in their preparation. This solution guarded against increased dependency while at the same time promoting mobilization of the laity and their ownership of the ministry.

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### **Which Type of Church Planter Is Best?**

Each of these methods can be used by God to fulfill biblical purposes. Those contemplating a church plant can determine the appropriate model by examining the compatibility of each

with broader biblical principles and each model's ability to reach biblical goals of church planting such as spiritual health, multiplication, indigenization, and stewardship of resources. Judged in this way, any of the three models might be the best model depending on the church planter, the setting, and God's sovereign working.

As indicated above, the pastoral model works best in moderate to highly responsive settings and among relatively affluent populations where trained pastors can be called, local resources are available to pay the salary, and prospects for church growth are high. It also requires that qualified pastors, usually formally trained, be locally available. In the case of cross-cultural church planting, the difficulty in transition from church planter-pastor to national pastor can be alleviated when the planter completes an internship under a national pastor as part of his or her preparation. In this way the church planter learns to adapt the style of ministry to local culture and expectations.

The catalytic model is best suited for urban areas with potential for multiple church plants in the region. A larger church often has regional attraction through high visibility and specialized ministries. That church can then, with catalytic leadership, launch daughter churches through those who were attracted from the surrounding communities and outlying areas. A larger church also has a larger pool of believers from which to recruit, train, and support church planters. However the church planter must be exceptionally gifted and able to make a long-term commitment. It requires tremendous vision and effort to keep a larger church outwardly focused and

committed to reproduction.

Though not without its challenges, the apostolic model is the one that we believe will best facilitate church multiplication, especially in cross-cultural ministry settings. It is most versatile, being suited for both rural and urban settings, affluent and poor populations, and seems to be the approach that God has most greatly blessed to facilitate rapidly growing church-planting movements throughout the world. But this approach demands far-sighted patience as well as significant rethinking and retraining of most church planters. Due to heavy dependence on local lay leaders, short-term growth and progress may seem at first very slow. On the other hand, the apostolic approach has the long-term promise of more rapid reproduction and multiplication because it is less dependent on missionaries or professional church planters and outside resources. Tom Steffen explains the importance of the apostolic approach in terms of preparing for the church planter's departure:

*The more church planters become involved in the day-to-day activities of evangelism, church development, and church multiplication, the less delegation will take place. Indeed, such an approach to ministry usually impedes the spiritual development of nationals, and ultimately slows or halts the phase-out process.*

The sooner the expatriates learn to delegate ministry opportunities and provide immediate feedback, the less the above axiom will apply. (1997, 174; italics in original)

This model may face difficulty where the focus population is

highly professional or educated and has the same expectations of pastoral leaders. In such settings lay leaders may receive little respect or have little time to be able to lead the church effectively. Finally, using the apostolic model, attention must be given to adequately teach and prepare local leaders. Poor or even false teaching is often a problem in rapidly growing movements where churches are led by young, untrained believers. Overcoming deeply rooted patterns of sin and societal evil and growing in worldview transformation is a process that can demand years of discipleship and wise leadership. In situations where the church planter quickly moves on, as the apostle Paul did, equal attention must be given to itinerant equipping and teaching ministries, such as that of Paul's coworker Apollos.

The church planter and each member of the team needs to be aware of the various options, be unified in their choice of the appropriate model, and consistently implement the model, being aware of its strengths and weaknesses. These considerations will often need to be made in consultation with the national church or local believers in order to avoid misunderstanding and ensure realistic expectations. In many if not most cases this will demand a reassessment of the church planter's role and self-understanding. The effectiveness of any church-planting model will largely depend on the church planter's willingness and ability to adapt his or her role to fit and facilitate the model.

## **Apostles and Missionaries versus Pastors and Elders**

In the Bible we find several helpful distinctions between ministries that are more pioneering and itinerant and those that are more strengthening and permanent. Recognizing these differences is important for understanding the role of an apostolic church planter. In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul writes, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” Here we see a distinction between the pioneering work of a planter versus the strengthening work of a waterer. Both Paul and Apollos were itinerant, and both were important to the planting of healthy churches. Though the church of Corinth has already been planted by Paul, who had departed for other pioneer work, Apollos later visited Corinth to further teach and encourage the believers there (Acts 18:27; 19:1).

In Acts 14:23 we read of how Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they had planted and commended them to the Lord, thus fully entrusting them with the ongoing spiritual leadership of the churches. Similarly, when Paul departed from Ephesus he committed the Ephesian elders to God and entrusted the church to their care (Acts 20:32). These elders remained in the churches, whereas the missionary team moved on to pioneer new locations. Until elders were appointed in a church, the work of church planting was considered unfinished (Titus 1:5).

The role of elders is described in terms of being shepherds or overseers of the church of God, providing spiritual care, teaching, and leadership (Acts 20:28–31; 1 Pet. 5:2–3). Ephesians 4:11 speaks of how God “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” Though there is no doubt some overlap

among the functions of these offices, there are still differences in emphasis. The Greek term translated as “apostle” derives from the concept of being sent, thus underlining the missionary and more itinerant nature of the ministry. The office of pastor and teacher is more or less equivalent to that of church elder. Table 5.2 summarizes our findings.

### **Table 5.2**

## Planters versus Waterers

| Apostles, Missionaries, Planters | Pastors, Elders, Waterers |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Itinerant                        | Remain                    |
| Pioneer                          | Strengthen                |
| Initiate                         | Grow                      |
| Evangelize and disciple          | Teach and counsel         |
| Equip and appoint elders         | Care for believers        |

These distinctions are not hard and fast. For example, although Paul was primarily an apostolic church planter, he also nurtured and taught the believers (e.g., Acts 20:20; 1 Thess. 2:8–12). But the apostolic planter always has an eye to his or her departure, the equipping of local believers who will remain behind, and the recruiting of additional church planters. The passion of the apostolic church planter is to move on to pioneer new regions (Rom. 15:20), not to remain as a pastor. Thus, after initial evangelism, the apostolic church planter will make the developing, empowering, and releasing of local believers a priority, will be ever cognizant of the temporary nature of her or his ministry, and will have a view to multiplication. This leads us to the evolving role of the apostolic church planter.

## **The Evolving Role of Apostolic Church Planters**

Apostolic church planters have the goal of equipping local believers to lead the church and to become the next generation of church planters. In chapter 17 we will discuss specific methods for equipping local believers for ministry. But here we note that the role of the apostolic church planter must intentionally evolve during the process, moving from the pioneering phase to the establishing, strengthening, and reproducing phases of the church plant.

As a pioneer missionary church planter among the Ifugao in the Philippines, Tom Steffen developed a practical “phase-out” approach to church planting. This model is explained in his book *Passing the Baton: Church Planting That Empowers* (1997) and represents the apostolic model we are describing. From the outset the church planter intentionally seeks to phase himself or herself out of the work by continually empowering nationals for ministry and multiplication.

Steffen became aware of how his mission agency was failing to plant reproducing churches and had neglected phase-out-oriented role changes as a part of church planter selection and preparation: “As a result, a number of church planters perceived their roles to be long-term pastors. Moreover, local believers were trained to assist the expatriates in fulfilling their objectives rather than [being trained] to take over for them. Too frequently, expatriates assumed that many years of training and ministry experience were necessary in order for nationals to lead their churches effectively, let alone plant new churches” (1997, 40). Steffen developed a five-stage phase-out

approach to church planting which led not only to the effective disengagement of the missionary but to modest church multiplication. “If church planting is to become a way of life within and without a particular people, national believers must own this vision and be trained to accomplish it. To facilitate this objective, church planters must be prepared for a series of changing roles that will swiftly propel national leaders into ministry roles, hence allowing them to become proficient” (Steffen 1997, 21). He describes these roles as moving from learner to evangelist, to teacher, to resident adviser, to itinerant adviser, and finally to absent adviser (see figure 5.1). The entire church-planting team must view its church-planting task as a temporary one: they exist to accomplish certain goals of equipping local believers and then moving on, what Steffen calls “phase-out.” He claims that it takes a certain type of individual to adopt such a selfless role, to genuinely place the development of nationals as leaders above the church planter’s own desires to serve and lead.

Figure 5.1  
**Tom Steffen’s Phase-Out Oriented Role Changes in  
Missionary Church Planting**

| Stage 1  | Stage 2       | Stage 3    | Stage 4          | Stage 5           |
|----------|---------------|------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Preentry | Preevangelism | Evangelism | Postevangelism   | Phase-out         |
| Learner  |               | Evangelist |                  |                   |
|          |               |            | Teacher          |                   |
|          |               |            | Resident Adviser |                   |
|          |               |            |                  | Itinerant Adviser |
|          |               |            |                  | Absent Adviser    |

We suggest a “6-M” approach to the changing role of the apostolic church planter, progressing from motor to model, mobilizer, mentor, multiplier, and finally memory (see figure 5.2). In a pioneer church-planting situation the planter begins as the *motor* because there are few if any other believers present who can be mobilized. But as soon as people become believers, the missionary begins to become more of a *model*, doing ministry in a manner that is easily copied by the new believers. He or she *mobilizes* them to take ownership of the ministry and *mentors* them in developing their ministry skills. The church planter *mentors* young believers and trains them to train others, at which point true *multiplication* of workers, and ultimately of churches, is being achieved. At this point the church planter can fully disengage from the church plant and thus become a *memory*—either moving on to pioneer a new church plant (ideally taking members from the first church plant as trainees) or continuing as a regional church-planting coach to help nurture the movement and advise local church planters.

Figure 5.2  
**The 6-M Roles of Apostolic Church Planters**

| Launching           | Developing               | Departing            |
|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Missionary as Motor |                          | →                    |
|                     | Missionary as Model      |                      |
| →                   | Missionary as Mobilizer  |                      |
|                     | Missionary as Mentor     |                      |
|                     | Missionary as Multiplier |                      |
|                     |                          | Missionary as Memory |

***Missionary as Model***—The missionary models ministry demonstrating evangelism, teaching, leading, *etc.* New believers will tend to follow the example of the missionary.

*Danger:* Modeling ministry in a way that is not reproducible.

***Missionary as Mobilizer***—As local people are won for Christ, the missionary motivates them for discipleship, service, and ownership of the ministry. They must come to sense God’s calling in their lives. *They* will be the ones ultimately responsible for outreach and ministry, not the missionary or mission.

*Dangers:* The missionary doing too much too long, or pushing ministry ahead before there is real ownership.

***Missionary as Mentor***—The missionary equips local believers for all essential ministries *as* those ministries are initiated. From the start they are responsible. The missionary increasingly plays a background role as mentor, advisor, coach. On-the-job equipping is central.

*Dangers:* Overuse of the school approach to equipping (abstract learning separated from actual praxis). Setting standards for ministry too high.

***Missionary as Multiplier***—The missionary equips local believers to become equippers of others and coaches the planting of the first daughter church. The missionary no longer performs “front line” ministry.

*Danger:* Missionary remains the real leader behind the scenes.

***Missionary as Memory***—The missionary having reproduced him/herself in local believers departs, either moving to another location (perhaps taking a national along as apprentice missionary), or becoming a regional church-planting coach.

*Danger:* Staying too long.

While many church planters will agree with this approach in principle, difficulties arise when local believers seem to lag in their willingness or ability to bear the responsibility of ministry.

Often the church planter becomes impatient and presses forward, initiating new programs and taking on more ministry responsibility, hoping that the nationals will catch up with a little time and maturity. But the opposite often happens: The local believers become increasingly dependent on the church planter, feeling inadequate to minister and convinced that the planter has no confidence in their abilities. Worst of all, they learn that if they just wait long enough, the missionary will plant the church and run the program without them! The church is viewed as the missionary's project apart from their contribution.

In this chapter we have seen that in addition to the familiar pastoral church planter there are other approaches that are more likely to facilitate church reproduction and multiplication. God has blessed the familiar pastoral approach, though the churches they plant usually reproduce slowly, if at all. God occasionally raises up catalytic church planters who impact whole cities. But the most remarkable church planting movements are launched and led by apostolic church planters who see themselves more as equippers of church planters than as pastors. In pioneer situations, the missionary will need to evangelize and disciple the first believers. But it is in those new believers that seeds for movement expansion and leadership lay. The greatest movement potential will be achieved by developing, empowering, and releasing local believers to evangelize, disciple, and plant churches in the power of the Holy Spirit.