# 4

# Church Multiplication and Indigenous Church-Planting Movements

One of the emphases of this book is the expansion of kingdom communities throughout the world. The truth is that churches give birth to other churches. Living things that are healthy reproduce naturally as part of their life cycle. Churches often do not. They can grow to maturity, become numerically impressive, but remain sterile. Reproduction must be intentional if the local church is to accomplish the full purpose to which it has been called and created.

For this reason, we emphasize the need to plant churches that have multiplication potential in their DNA, that stress organic rather than organizational values, that favor centrifugal rather than centripetal growth (outward sending rather than inward retaining), and that use reproducible structures and ministries. The fulfillment of the Great Commission requires a Pauline type of commitment to taking the gospel and planting the church in outward concentric movements, always extending forward to regions it has not penetrated. In this chapter we will examine biblical and historic patterns and principles that support this outward movement of church multiplication.

Indigeneity and church-planting movements are both critical to multiplication. These two concepts go together, as we believe that only indigenous churches will truly reproduce and multiply. In the words of John Mark Terry, "The missionary effort to establish indigenous churches is an effort to plant churches that fit naturally into their environment and to avoid planting churches that replicate Western patterns" (2000, 483). Indigeneity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for church multiplication. Many other factors are at play in church-planting movements, some of which we will examine in the following pages. We also still have much to learn.

After a brief overview of church-planting movements and indigeneity in the New Testament, we will consider how these two critical factors developed in missiological thinking and practice. We then conclude with what we believe are principles and practices that contribute to church multiplication.

## Church-Planting Movements and Indigeneity in the New Testament

Although the term *church-planting movement* is not found in the Scriptures, the phenomenon is. The early church did not grow in a systematic, graded fashion but through successive waves of expansion, penetrating new regions and people groups in its path.

The Judean movement that came from Pentecost (Acts 2–7) gave birth to the next wave as the believers were dispersed by persecution (Acts 8). New believers returned to their homes in Samaria, Galilee, Syria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Cyrene (Acts 8–

10; 11:19).[1] The Syrian Antioch church came from the dispersion of believers rather than apostolic ministry (Acts 8). It became the center of a growing movement to the Gentiles (Acts 11:25–26), and from there successive waves of missionary activity extended the church through new geographic, linguistic, and ethnic frontiers (Acts 13–18).

Then Paul and his colleagues established new indigenous churches in centers of influence of the Jewish Diaspora and prepared the believers as best they could—in spite of the opposition—to spread the gospel to neighboring cities and villages. Movements also emerged from Thessalonica and Ephesus. Even Pisidian Antioch, the scene of fierce opposition to the gospel, became a missionary base such that "the word of the Lord spread through the whole region" (Acts 13:49).

Ephesus deserves special attention. As we have noted in chapter 2, it became a center for evangelism and training for the Lycos Valley and much of Asia Minor (Acts 19:26). The seven churches addressed in Revelation 2–3 and the churches in Colossae and Hierapolis were most likely extension works, and commentators surmise that the churches in Revelation were probably representative of many other churches that emerged from this movement.[2] Here we see an example of training local workers to start new churches. The exponential, lay-driven, evangelistic character of this growth may be observed in the highlighted phrases in the passages listed below.

- Acts 9:31. "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was

strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it *grew in numbers*, living in the fear of the Lord."

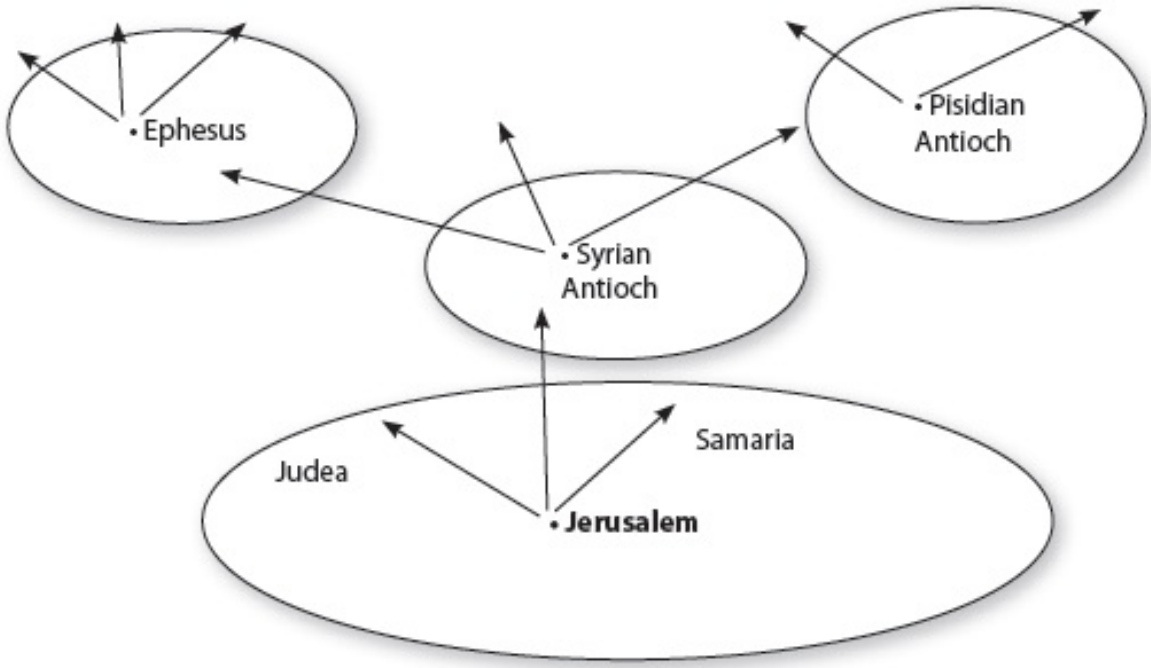
- Acts 11:20–21. "Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and *a great number of people believed* and turned to the Lord."
- Acts 12:24. James was killed, "but the Word of God *continued to increase and spread*."
- Acts 13:49. "The word of the Lord *spread through the whole region*" (Pisidian Antioch).
- Acts 19:10. "This went on for two years, so that *all the Jews and Greeks* who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Ephesus).
- 1 Thessalonians 1:8. "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in *God has become known everywhere*" (Thessalonica).

In summary, the Holy Spirit led the apostles and lay witnesses to spread the Word always onward and outward, and in less than four decades the gospel had penetrated all the pagan centers of the Roman Empire. Figure 4.1 illustrates this outward movement of church multiplication.

Michael Green (1970) observes that although the apostles and evangelists had a role to play, the outward expansion of

the church came primarily through the witness of lay believers as they moved to other regions. Historically, church multiplication has almost always been primarily from "Jesus movements" (lay driven and evangelistic). "So at the heart of all great movements is a recovery of a simple Christology (essential conceptions of who Jesus is and what he does), one that accurately reflects the Jesus of the New Testament faith—they are in a very literal sense *Jesus* movements" (Hirsch 2006, 85–86). The term *indigenous* is not found in the New Testament. However, New Testament studies have increasingly examined the way in which churches of the New Testament era engaged culture in ways that were both contextually appropriate and counterculturally biblical (Flemming 2005; Banks 1994; Longenecker 2002). The landmark decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 resolved the question of the role of the law of Moses in the Christian church theologically. But the issue also had cultural implications inasmuch as it freed the church from its Jewish cultural confines and allowed Gentile churches to express themselves in culturally appropriate ways that did not violate biblical moral standards. Thus this decision, which has been called the "emancipation proclamation" of the church, has allowed churches to become acculturated and indigenous wherever they are planted (Flemming 2005, 43–55; Hilary 1995).

Figure 4.1
**New Testament Church-Planting Movements**




Perhaps more important, churches of the Pauline mission in the New Testament were quickly placed under the guidance and leadership of local (i.e., indigenous) elders, who were commended to the Lord (Acts 14:23; 20:32). Paul's missionary band never stayed in a long-term leadership role over the churches that were planted. Rather they itinerated, moving on to pioneer new regions with only infrequent contact with the established churches. These congregations were indigenous in that they were entirely rooted in the local culture, led by local leaders, and supported by local means. For the most part, they were led by unpaid elders and met in private homes.

## Indigenous Principles

Although some of the terminology has changed, the study of church multiplication is far from new. Rufus Anderson (1796–1880) of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and Henry Venn (1796–1873) of the English Church Missionary Society framed the Protestant understanding of indigeneity with their famous three-self formula: self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting (Anderson 1869). Though the three-self formula had its limitations and has been expanded upon (see discussions in Kraft and Wisley 1979), it became, at least in theory, the goal of most Protestant church planting until the midtwentieth century. But two others would critically reexamine missionary practice and shape mission thinking for decades in terms of practical ways that such indigenous churches could be planted and reproduce: John L. Nevius and Roland Allen.

### *John L. Nevius*

John L. Nevius (1829–93), a Presbyterian missionary to China, experimented with new approaches to evangelism and church planting. He developed what came to be known as the Nevius Plan, which included three key elements: First, churches should be entirely self-supporting and led by unpaid national lay workers. He found the practice of hiring young Chinese believers as evangelists counterproductive, as such workers lost credibility, often became mercenary, and created financial dependencies in the emerging churches. Second, only church methods and means for which local believers could take

responsibility should be used. He insisted that places of worship should be built in native style with local resources. Local believers should select and support their own leaders. The third element of the Nevius plan was that believers were to be carefully instructed in Bible classes. The Bible was to be central to the entire work. Converts should be tested and trained simultaneously in their natural environment (Nevius 1958).

The initial church planting in Korea serves as an example of a lay, indigenous church-multiplication movement. The response to Nevius in the missionary community was by no means unanimously affirmative. But in 1890 he received an invitation to speak to a group of seven young Presbyterian missionaries who were beginning their work in Korea. They wholeheartedly adopted his approach as mission policy. From the start the work was self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing, growing in four years from one church with 93 members to 153 churches with a total of 8,500 members and adherents (Glover 1960; Rhodes and Campbell 1964).

Some argue that the church's multiplication in Korea was simply due to a special work of God and the receptivity of the Koreans. However, Alfred Wasson (1934) compared the growth of the Methodist Church in Korea, which did not use the Nevius plan, with that of the Presbyterian Church, which did. He found that although these works followed parallel tracks for the first decade, the Methodist work leveled off in the next two decades while the Presbyterian work continued growing. He concluded that the main difference between the two movements was not the conversion rate but the higher rate

of attrition in the Methodist Church, which he attributed to its failure to consistently follow indigenous principles (see also Brown 1994).

### *Roland Allen*

Roland Allen (1869–1947), missionary to China and Africa and mission consultant, released in 1912 his revolutionary *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* and then in 1927 a sequel, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It*. Frustrated by the slow progress of missionary work, Allen argued for a return to methods similar to those that Paul employed to plant numerous churches over a short period of time. Observing that new church movements overseas suffered under missionary control, Allen took aim at mission leadership, contending, "If the church is to be indigenous it must spring up in the soil from the very first seeds planted" (1962b, 2). He urged missionaries to entrust local believers to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to manage their own affairs, free of missionary dominance, as Paul did, with a "profound belief and trust in the Holy Spirit indwelling his converts and the church of which they are members" (1962a, vii). Western forms of the church, foreign institutions, efforts at "civilizing the natives," outside financial support, and condescending attitudes must all be abandoned to release the spiritual dynamic evident in the mission of the early church.

The missionary church planter "then stands by as counseling elder brother while the Holy Spirit leads the new church, self-governing and self-supporting, to develop its own form of polity, ministry, worship, and life. Such a church is spontaneously missionary" (Beaver 1981, B–71). A movement that does not have these three self-characteristics will remain dependent and never become a missionary movement. Unfortunately, Allen's call to a spontaneous expansion under

indigenous leadership, though widely praised, was not generally adopted in practice by most mission agencies until after World War II.

### *Research on Church-Planting Movements*

If the nineteenth century was, to use Kenneth Scott Latourette's term, the "great century" of launching Protestant missions, then the twentieth century was the "growth century" of the churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Those churches experienced exponential growth and by the 1980s came to constitute over half of all Christians in the world. By the midtwentieth century missiologists began empirically examining factors that contributed to rapidly growing movements, in an attempt to discern principles that could guide mission and church-planting practice.

### *The Church Growth Movement*

Few have studied the dynamics of church growth and large Christian conversion movements as did Donald A. McGavran (1897–1990) and the Church Growth Movement (CGM) he launched. The CGM sought to utilize the social and behavioral sciences to research the causes of church growth and, in the process, produced hundreds of empirical studies of church growth and church-planting movements. Beginning with his landmark *The Bridges of God* (1955) and culminating in his classic *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), McGavran formulated several church growth principles that were at times controversial.

First was the principle of *people movements*—new believers should not be extracted from their natural sphere of relationships, but they should become "God's bridges" to reaching others in their society. A movement ensues when groups of people (not just individuals) decide to become followers of Christ and in turn lead others in their network of relationships to Christ. In this way believers are not socially dislocated when becoming Christians. McGavran claimed that up to 90 percent of church growth in the "younger churches" was a result of people movements.

Second, McGavran advocated the *harvest principle*, calling for missionary efforts to be concentrated on populations most responsive to the gospel. Mission outreach should focus on peoples God has ripened for spiritual harvest, much in the way that a farmer harvests only when and where the fruit is ripe. No people group should be without a witness for Christ, but the majority of missionary personnel and resources should be

devoted to receptive people so as not to miss the opportunity and to maximize conversion and church growth.

By far the most controversial concept was the *homogeneous unit principle*. McGavran famously claimed, "Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers" (1980, 223). He argued for the planting of culturally, socially, or ethnically homogeneous churches, that is, churches composed primarily of people who are alike. In this way social barriers to reception of the gospel could be removed. People should not have to surrender their cultural identity to become Christians. The only obstacle to a person's becoming a Christian, McGavran claimed, should be the gospel itself, not culture, language, or race.

There are many parallels between McGavran's principles and concepts of indigeneity that preceded him. But the CGM came under heavy criticism for being overly pragmatic, theologically shallow, and methodologically reductionistic. Nevertheless, many observations made by McGavran and others are helpful if seen in the broader light that churches must be indigenous in form and leadership, Spirit directed, and self-supporting if they are to multiply and become a missionary force.

### *David Garrison's Common Elements of Church-Planting Movements*

As the twenty-first century dawned there was a renewed interest in rapid indigenous church multiplication, or church-planting movements (CPMs). Exponential church multiplication has been documented by several people, but David Garrison

(2000 and 2004a), more than any other missiologist, has stirred broad interest in it through his qualitative study of CPMs in diverse settings.[3] His research focused more on the internal qualities of these movements and of the churches that reproduce to form them. He defined a CPM as "a rapid and exponential increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment" (2000, 8). Although his studies of CPMs are very recent and are more descriptive than prescriptive, we want to explore the dynamics and DNA of CPMs, as well as church-planting practices that contribute to multiplication and those that deter it.

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**Sidebar 4.1**

## Garrison's Ten Common Elements of Church-Planting Movements

- Extraordinary prayer
- Abundant evangelism
- Intentional planting of reproducing churches
- The authority of God's Word
- Local leadership
- Lay leadership
- House churches
- Churches planting churches
- Rapid reproduction
- Healthy churches

*Source*: Garrison 2004a, 172.

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Garrison compiled breathtaking accounts of what God is doing through CPMs and identified some of their common elements. Though the accuracy of some of Garrison's case studies has been questioned, his findings are nevertheless instructive. Garrison and his research group have identified ten such common elements listed in sidebar 4.1.[4]

The suggestion is that these ten elements are indicators of the vitality and viability of the movement which enable it to transcend the lifespan of the founder(s), hurdle generational and cultural barriers, and have a broad and lasting impact. Church planters can also use them as leading indicators or benchmarks to assess their church planting, strengthen movement synergy, minimize movement deterrents, and move toward healthy practices for their context.

Without a doubt all these CPM common elements are desirable. While we find the common elements to be helpful benchmarks, reproduction cannot be expected to follow a similar path in all societies, nor will churches reproduce at the same rate or be shaped and associated together in the same way. It should also be noted that external factors such as the spiritual landscape, attitudes toward outsiders and their beliefs, and the social-political climate also play a role.

## Church-Planting Movement Principles

What can we conclude from all the research and common elements discussed thus far? What are the principles and practices that will advance church multiplication and give birth to indigenous church-planting movements? It is essential that we wrestle with how to contribute to church-planting movements by identifying positive culturally adaptable practices rather than by building a global methodology or strategy. Sidebar 4.2 summarizes broad guiding principles that should serve the development of healthy culturally appropriate practices.

### *Church-Planting Movements Are Works of the Holy Spirit*

The most commonly attested belief among people who are involved directly with CPMs is that these amazing movements are God-ordained special interventions. This is why they are sometimes described as *spontaneous* expansion or spontaneous combustion (Allen 1962b; Berg and Pretiz 1996). Humans can cooperate with God or get in the way, but God produces the growth (Mark 4:26–29; 1 Cor. 3:5–7). If there is anything that stands out in the spread of the gospel and growth of the church in the book of Acts, it is the dynamic working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers (1:8), emboldens (4:31), bears witness (5:32), gives wisdom (6:10), guides (8:29; 16:6–7), encourages (9:31), performs miracles (10:38), calls and sends workers (13:1–4; 20:28), and gives joy (13:52). CPMs are empowered by the Holy Spirit as he works through Spirit-filled church planters and believers.

**Sidebar 4.2**

## Church-Planting Movement Principles

- CPMs are works of the Holy Spirit
- CPMs are gospel centered
- CPMs are lay grassroots movements
- CPMs have a multiplication DNA
- CPMs are influenced by external factors

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Of vital concern should be the spiritual health and fervor of the initial disciples, leaders and churches. Fervent prayer and wide sowing of the gospel pave the way for church multiplication but cannot totally explain it, because similar efforts among other people groups do not always yield a church-planting movement. However, churches in CPMs display passionate spirituality, fervent prayer, strong spiritual disciplines of fasting and spiritual battle, contagious worship, abundant evangelism, and wholesome loving relationships. Spirit empowerment and spiritual dynamics are more significant than methodology and practices in CPMs.

### *Church-Planting Movements Are Gospel Centered*

Church planters proclaim a gospel message that is presented in the language of the people and touches some of their deepest aspirations. Again the book of Acts unequivocally

describes the spread of Christianity in terms of the Word of God being proclaimed, changing lives, and giving birth to the church. The gospel was the center of the apostolic message (4:31; 6:2; 8:14, 25, 40; 11:1; 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48; 15:7, 35, 36; 16:10, 32; 17:13; 19:10; 20:24)—and the Word of God itself, not the preacher or church planter, was called the primary active agent (6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20). So it has been ever since: church-planting movements are gospel driven. They uncompromisingly, boldly, and clearly proclaim Christ, calling for faith, repentance, and obedient discipleship.

In order for the gospel to be the driving force, it must be expressed in a language that conveys its full, powerful meaning. When the message is placed into the hands of local people who communicate it accurately and relevantly, it will provide the foundation for truly indigenous churches. Thus true "indigenization consists essentially in the full employment of local indigenous forms of communication, methods of transmission, and communicators, as these means can be prepared and trained" (Nida 1960, 185). Lamin Sanneh (1989; 1995; 2008) has pointed out that the translation of the gospel into local vernaculars releases the power of the gospel in the local culture and empowers local people to self-theologize and apply that Word in fresh and relevant ways. To become an indigenous expression of faith, a people group must go deep into the Word for itself in order to demonstrate how the gospel addresses the critical life issues and questions of its culture. This process of shaping life and ministry around the Scriptures by engaging the culture through theological reflection is self-theologizing at its best.

### *Church-Planting Movements Are Lay Grassroots Movements*

Movement impact is directly proportionate to the degree of determined and enthusiastic grassroots[5] participation and lay involvement. Church-planting movements are disciplemaking movements that empower ordinary people to make a kingdom difference in the world as they rely on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This occurs when these people not only profess but also live out the priesthood of all believers.

One of the most evident features of CPMs is that although they may be launched by missionaries, they become movements only when the local people have embraced the gospel and caught the vision to reach their people, towns, cities, and beyond. It is not a missionary, a strategic plan, or a cold sense of duty that drives the movement. Rather the Spirit of God instills new believers with a passion for Jesus Christ, a love for the lost, and a willingness to sacrifice whatever it takes to bring that message to others. Church planters can only pray for this and model it in their own lives. In this sense the "coming of age" of the movement can be jeopardized if local leaders are not Spirit empowered and sufficiently set free to set the course of the movement in the launching and establishing phases of a pioneer work.

### *Church-Planting Movements Have a Multiplication DNA*

Church-planting movements are special works of God in which disciples, leaders, cells, and churches reproduce on an

ongoing basis. Note the difference between reproduction and multiplication. If a very powerful church reproduces once every year for ten years and all the daughter churches survive, there will be a cluster of eleven churches in a decade. On the other hand, if both mother *and* daughter churches reproduce every year and all the churches survive, in the tenth year there will be 512 churches! Multiplication is multigenerational reproduction that is passed on from one generation to another as an organic part of the church DNA. Some churches will not survive birth, but those that do will be spiritually fertile. The goal is not multiplication for its own sake or even exponential growth in and of itself. The ultimate goal is the knowledge and glory of the true God over the whole earth. This will happen as more and more people groups are saturated with healthy, interdependent, indigenous kingdom communities that in turn send missionaries to the remaining unreached people groups until the Great Commission is fulfilled (see sidebar 4.3). The way this will take place is described in the healthy practices discussed later in this chapter.

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**Sidebar 4.3**

## Church Multiplication Terminology

- Planting: starting a new church
- Addition: starting another new church
- Reproduction: a church plants a new church
- Multiplication: churches reproduce over several generations
- Church-planting movement: the result of church multiplication; church

reproduction becomes the norm and is built into the DNA of churches and church planting
- Saturation: when church-planting movements fill a geographic area with viable, reproducing churches among all its people groups

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### *Church-Planting Movements Are Influenced by External Factors*

The limited record indicates that all contexts are not equally suited to CPMs and that external factors are also at play.[6] Some who analyze CPMs have tended to be reductionistic, examining a limited range of influences and factors in attempt to find the golden key or silver bullet for church growth and multiplication. A more comprehensive approach, one that takes into consideration a wide range of factors and combines the various insights, will give the fullest and most realistic picture. Paul Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses (1995, 9–19) speak of various interpretive maps by which to interpret a phenomenon; each useful for its own purposes, but none gives the complete picture by itself. The church planter will, in fact, have little control over many of the important factors influencing CPMs.

For example, rapidly growing movements are found more frequently in collectivistic societies than in places where individualism and secularism have taken hold. McGavran's (1980, 269–94) study of people movements turning to Christ revealed that "the masses not the classes" tend to be most responsive to the gospel. It is among the poor and the working class, not the elite or upper classes, that most large movements

to Christ occur. It would appear that CPMs most often emerge in times of change and upheaval, during abnormal disruptions in society, and in the midst of persecution, rather than in times of peace and stability. These seasons of change are hard to predict and impossible to control.

Often CPMs occur where folk religion or loosely structured religion predominates (Grady and Kendall 1992). Clayton Berg and Paul Pretiz (1996) draw sociological parallels between grassroots Protestant churches and popular folk religions in Latin America. When the structures and expressions emerge from the local culture, like indigenous plants from their natural soil, the movement has a *natural feel* from the start. Congruent forms and functions serve like railroad tracks on which the movement can readily advance.

The relationship to the traditional establishment is also significant. If there is a mood for change, the movement should be poised to offer an alternative, but if the traditional belief system is still widely accepted, the movement should build on similarities (Allen 1962b; Peters 1970). This is perhaps why some marginalized people groups, ostracized by the majority, have embraced the Christian message more readily than the group in power (Garrison 2004a, 42, 109, 124, 221–24).

Therefore when the response is slow, church planters should pray patiently, sow the gospel, and make strong disciples using indigenous principles. There will be pressure to shift to another approach, to assume the pastoral role, or to become the primary "doers" of the ministry. But this is counterproductive in the long run. Expatriate workers who do this may plant a church—even a large church—but will not

launch a CPM, and they may in the process set a negative precedent that hurts multiplication for another generation.

The following example illustrates the interplay of external factors and movement qualities. Between 1975 and 1985 in Quebec, a very traditional Catholic society, the number of evangelical local churches more than tripled, growing from fewer than 100 to 324 (Smith 1997). That period was called the Quiet Revolution because Quebec took a quantum leap toward secularization and modernity. The liberal government took over control of the public sphere from the conservative political and religious forces that had dominated society. Yet even in the wake of the Quiet Revolution the people of Quebec maintained a Christian worldview and looked for religious alternatives. This tension created a door of opportunity for the gospel. "The greatest growth took place in rural areas where disillusionment with Catholicism's grip on society left the greatest spiritual vacuum" (Wilson 1998, 28). Those who had faithfully and patiently sowed the gospel witnessed a great ingathering of believers.[7] This church growth movement waned in the twenty-first century as secularism and materialism set in, but by that time the religious landscape of the province had been changed.

## Best Practices for Church Multiplication

Having examined these general truths about CPMs, the remainder of this book is devoted primarily to the church-planting "best practices"[8] that will most likely lead to church reproduction and multiplication.[9] Based on his research, Garrison has summarized "Ten Commandments for Church Planting Movements" (2004a, 257; 2005):

1. Immerse your community in prayer.
2. Saturate your community with the gospel.
3. Cling to God's Word.
4. Fight against foreign dependency.
5. Eliminate all nonreproducible elements.
6. Live the vision that you wish to fulfil.
7. Build reproduction into every believer and church.
8. Train all believers to evangelize, disciple and plant churches
9. Model, assist, watch, leave
10. Discover what *God* is doing and join him

These practices are consistent with principles of indigeneity and church-planting movements; yet they must be applied in different ways according to the context. They are not a formula for success, and implementing them does not guarantee church multiplication. However, our observations, along with others', confirm that multiplication will rarely occur when these

practices are neglected.

Unlike Garrison, we are concerned less with *rapid* multiplication than with *healthy* multiplication. He writes, "Most church planters involved in these movements contend that rapid reproduction is vital to the movement itself . . . and that when reproduction rates slow down, the Church Planting Movement falters" (2000, 36). It is desirable that churches have a short gestation period so that they do not become inward focused and fail to reproduce; and of course we rejoice when God grants rapid growth (as in the early church). Furthermore, an emphasis on rapid reproduction communicates the urgency of evangelism, the necessity of lay leadership, and the need to avoid encumbering elements such as salaries, buildings, and degrees.

However, although rapid multiplication produces more churches, it does not necessarily produce healthier churches or fruit that remains. There must be a balance between evangelistic urgency and healthy maturational growth. Forcing rapid church multiplication can sometimes backfire. Sometimes seemingly slower methods in the beginning can lay stronger foundations for not only healthier but indeed often faster-growing movements in the long run.

Interestingly, the Bible has a lot to say about church growth but not much about the rate of reproduction, and Jesus puts the emphasis on *abundant* fruit rather than rapid yield (John 15). He speaks about the mysterious (Mark 4:26–29), expansive (Matt. 13:31–32), and penetrating power of the kingdom (Matt. 13:33). But he never seems to emphasize rapidity of growth. On the contrary, he warns that *good* soil will yield different

degrees of fruit (Matt. 13:23). Orlando Costas summarizes the biblical concept of balanced, healthy, and holistic growth:

> God wants and expects his church to grow—but not lopsidedly, not abnormally. He wants his church to grow in *breadth*, numerically, as an apostolic community. He wants his church to grow in *depth*, experientially, organically and conceptually, as a worshipping and nurturing community. He wants his church to grow in *height*, as a visible model, a sign of the new order of life introduced by Jesus Christ which is challenging this world's powers and principalities. (1979, 37–38)

Our responsibility is to plant churches according to biblical principles and wise counsel. We strive to understand and apply best practices of indigenous church multiplication and then entrust the results, and the speed of those results, to God.

### *Adopt an Apostolic Approach to Church Planting*

Apostolic church planters (to be described fully in the next chapter) lay the foundation for reproducing kingdom communities. They equip and empower local believers and leaders using methods that can easily be replicated by these new church leaders as the planters move on to other areas to start new congregations. Then they return periodically to encourage and strengthen the leaders of established churches and may, in the process, raise up and coach another generation of church planters. The adoption of apostolic church-planting methods entails a radical rethinking of the commonly accepted role of the church planter in the Western church, away from that of a pastor-caregiver toward that of a pioneer entrepreneur who establishes new churches led by local disciples and leaders.

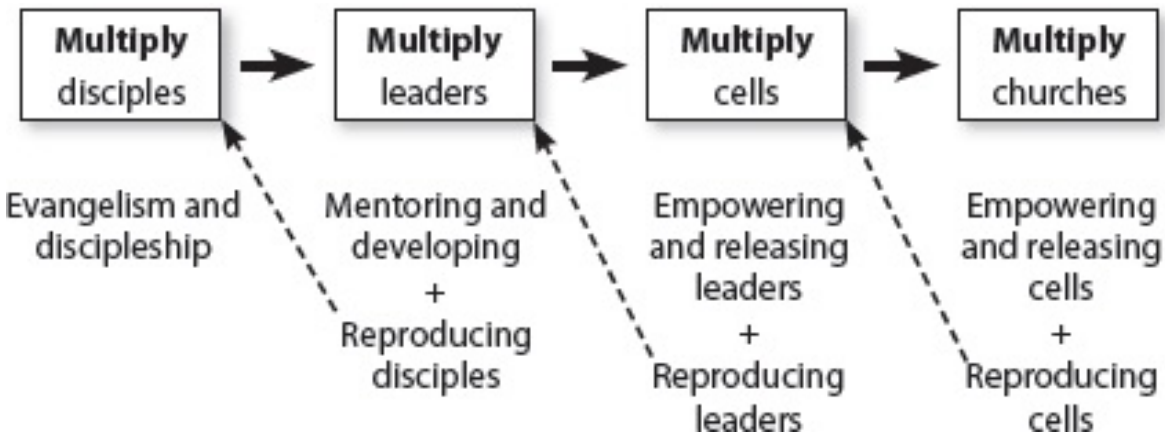
In areas of higher population density, such as growing multicultural cities, apostolic church planters may be involved in several church-planting projects at once, each having arrived at a different stage of maturity. In one neighborhood they may be sowing the gospel, in another establishing the leaders of a new church, and in a third helping an existing church to reproduce.

### *Develop, Empower, and Release Local Workers, Recruiting from the Harvest*

Effective apostolic church planters identify potential local workers and pour themselves into their lives. These may be "men of peace"[10] (Luke 10:5–6; cf. Matt. 10:11–13) who welcome the gospel and grow rapidly into obedient disciples and effective lay evangelists. Many of these serve as bridge people to the community and become the most effective church planters.[11] The cross-cultural team is like the scaffolding, and the emerging national leaders are the pillars around which the church is built. A good rule of thumb is not to start a ministry or church group without local apprentices who can lead the church in the not-too-distant future.

One of the keys to the Pauline mission was the way in which Paul not only equipped and empowered local leaders to care for churches after his departure but also recruited members of his missionary team from the churches he had planted—coworkers like Timothy from Lystra (Acts 16:1) and Apollos from Ephesus (Acts 18:24–26). We shall return to the developing, empowering, and releasing of workers in chapter 17.

Figure 4.2
**Multiply Disciples, Leaders, Cells**



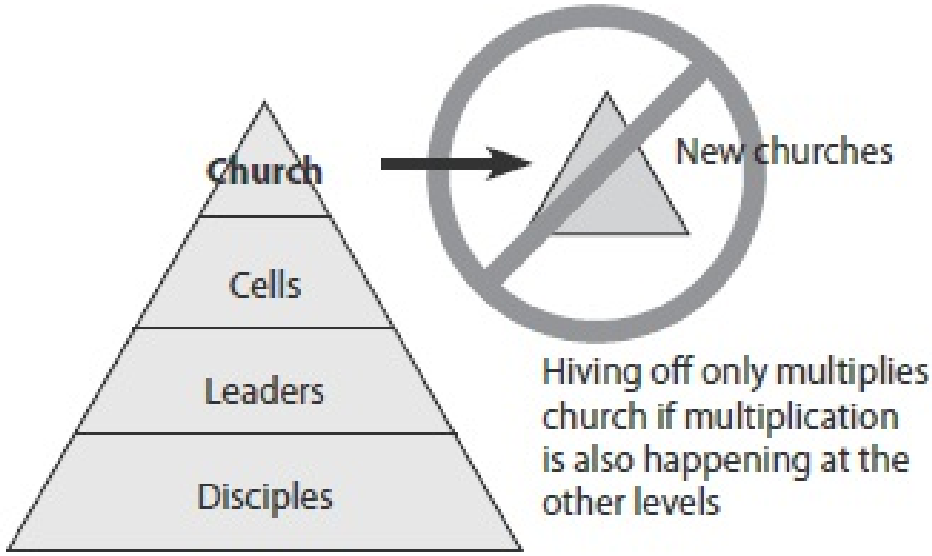

### *Maintain an Ongoing Emphasis on Evangelism and Discipleship*

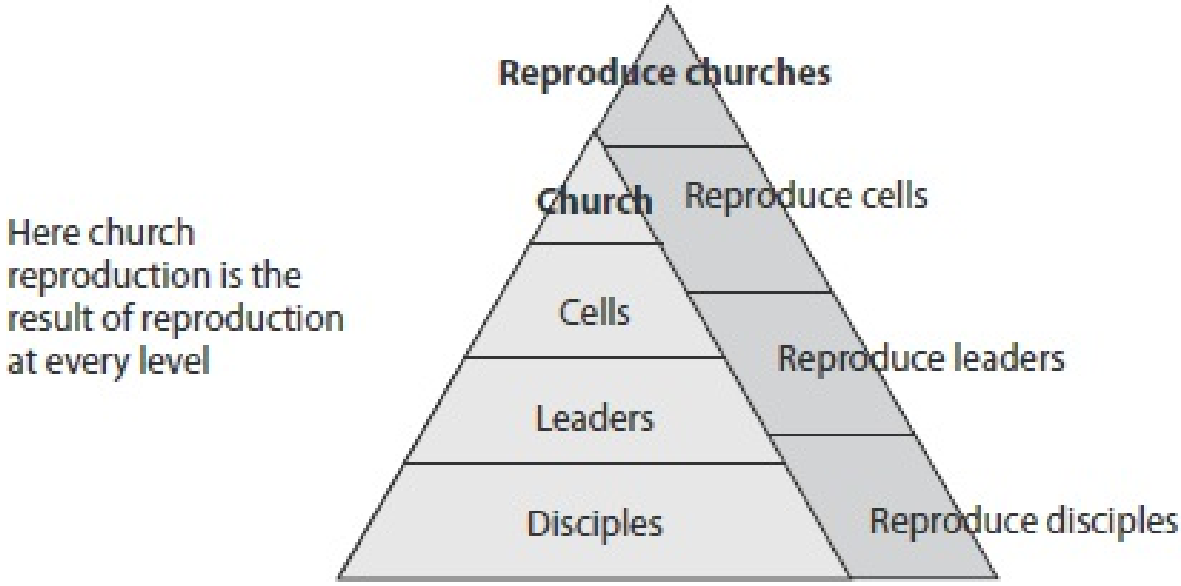
Since the basic building block of the church is the disciple, the focus of apostolic church planting must remain disciplemaking: Leading people *to* Christ, and instructing them to live *with* Christ, in the fellowship of Christ's community (the church). This was emphasized in Jesus's initial call, when he promised to make his followers *fishers of men*, and was his final commission, when he sent them out to *disciple the nations*. Although the need for evangelism and discipling appears obvious, it is often overlooked because the pastoral approach to church planting prioritizes plans, programs, and pastoral care. We suggest, though, that success or failure in church planting is directly related to fruitfulness in making new disciples (see figure 4.2). CPMs plateau and die when church planters move from an outward evangelistic focus to an inward-looking maintenance mode.

### *Build Multiplication into Every Level of Church Life and Ministry*

The principles of multiplication delineated thus far apply to all phases of development of a church plant and to everything that can be reproduced: disciples, leaders or workers, cells, and churches. Thus evangelism must be done in a way that new believers can easily imitate, and those new believers must be taught to become the next evangelists. Similarly, as the first believers are discipled, they should be discipled in ways that they can in turn use to disciple others. As the first cell groups are formed, they should be led in such a way that new cell group leaders can be apprenticed to take over the leadership and then train others to do the same (2 Tim. 2:2). As cell groups divide and multiply, church multiplication is not far away because an ethos of multiplication has been built into the church from the very start. Bob Roberts (2008, 58–60) and others have argued that merely "hiving off" church members to start new churches will not in itself lead to multiplication (see figure 4.3). Multiplication must take place at every level.

Figure 4.3
**Contrast between "Hiving Off" and Multiplication**




### *Model Ministry That Can Be Reproduced by Local People Using Local Resources*

If multiplication is the goal, then the watchword in virtually everything the church planter does is *reproducibility*. Reproducibility goes beyond mere equipping in several ways. If local believers merely do what the pioneer church planters

did, this will lead only to church addition. But when local believers, in turn, mobilize other local believers to serve and plant churches, multiplication begins to occur.

This can happen only when the methods modeled by the church planter are easily replicated by local believers using resources readily available to them in their context. If methods used to pioneer the church plant are not easily reproduced by local believers given their educational, financial, or other limitations, then the movement normally falters. Multiplication will be impossible. Nonreproducible methods such as short-term teams, English second-language camps, or large expensive campaigns may be employed initially to jump-start a movement. But much like jumper cables, such nonreproducible methods should be removed without delay in favor of more grassroots forms of witness and disciplemaking. Reproducible methods are characterized by the following qualities.

### They Depend on Local Resources

Garrison (2000; 2004a) has demonstrated that CPMs do not normally depend on outside resources and can arise even among the poorest people group that is facing persecution. To avoid a *reproduction gap*, missionaries must begin with the resources locally available. Computers, projectors, vehicles, and large budgets may all be beyond the means of the local people. Occasional gifts of this sort may be appreciated, but if entire ministries are built on them, they will not be locally reproducible. We will come back to this below when addressing "deterrents to multiplication."

### They Build on the Skills and Abilities of Local Believers

If local believers are illiterate or functionally illiterate, oral methods will need to be employed. Typically, such oral cultures are marked by exceptional storytelling traditions and skills. These can become wonderful and effective indigenous methods for evangelism and teaching. Expatriate workers are trained in ministry skills and leadership styles often not available to nationals. The expatriates may see the shape of a ministry as an issue of quality rather than culture and expect the nationals to rise to *their* standards and expectations.[12] Even if such standards were within reach of the locals, applying them would be counterproductive to the development of a CPM. Leadership skill levels should be determined by local standards and follow local patterns. For the church planter, this means maintaining spiritual requirements while intentionally keeping skill requirements to a minimum. The same principle applies to leadership style, teaching methods, standards of performance, and lifestyle expectations.

### They Are Easily Taught, Caught, and Passed On

The multiplication of churches and church leaders will require methods that are not only based upon the resources, skills, and abilities of local people but also easily learned and employed by another generation of disciples. Apostolic church planters must learn to ask, "Could national workers work in this way? Would they naturally choose to do so and train others to do the same?" And they should answer these questions by progressively stepping aside and allowing local believers to

adapt the pattern or develop their own. A rule of thumb is, if you can't teach local leaders to do it, and they couldn't teach others to do it, you probably shouldn't do it either. True multiplication has been achieved when local believers themselves are able to train the next generation of leaders. Whereas it may be advantageous for the long-term development of a movement that a few receive Bible school or seminary training (typically lasting years), the majority should be trained using methods that can be readily reproduced. Because such an approach is contrary to much common mission practice and may require more time initially, it is essential that everyone involved understand the importance of employing reproducible and sustainable methods that use only local resources.

### *Choose Contextually Appropriate Church Structures for Multiplication*

When foreign church structures and traditions are imposed on a people, the church becomes, like David in Saul's armor, unnecessarily encumbered for battle. Church multiplication will rarely occur. The explosion of indigenous movements today is testimony to the importance of indigenous forms.[13] Just as a cactus would not survive long in Alaska, nor a pine tree in the Sahara, so too indigenous church structures must be developed that allow the church to thrive and multiply in its own environment. In chapter 6 we will discuss the various shapes that churches might take and how these affect the potential for multiplication in different contexts. One size and

shape does not fit all. The Bible allows for great flexibility in the forms and expressions a local church might take, so long as these serve biblical purposes and are consistent with biblical values. In chapter 12 we will offer further help for discovering contextually appropriate forms of evangelism, discipleship, church meetings, worship, decision making, leadership development, and a host of other aspects of church life that are critical to church multiplication (see Hiebert and Meneses 1995). Such discoveries need to be made by local believers themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the authority of God's Word. Missionaries and outsiders may offer helpful counsel, but their role is to assist, not to dictate.

## Deterrents to Church Multiplication

Movement expansion depends on the degree to which Spirit-led local believers are permitted to operate unshackled by traditional or imported structures and controls. What are some of the worst stumbling blocks on the road to church multiplication? By common consensus, the three expectations of the Western church that have done the most damage to indigenous church-planting movements are expensive meeting places, formally educated, paid church planters, and overdependence on outside resources. None of these were expectations of the New Testament church, and none of them survive periods of persecution. Buildings, degrees, and outside funds can occasionally be used to leverage growth, as long as they do not become part of the DNA of multiplying leaders and churches. "When, in the name of Christ's commission, we do for indigenous believers what they can and should do for themselves, we undermine the very church that God has called us to plant" (Saint 2001, 54). The following deterrents should be carefully considered.

### *Deterrent 1: Expensive Church Meeting Places*

Garrison (2000; 2004a) observes that in CPMs the fellowships meet in homes or small storefronts. Obviously the Bible does not prescribe church size or church structure. In some contexts a movement of house churches may be the best vehicle for healthy, strong, indigenous reproduction. If a church plant decides that a more public meeting place is desirable, it is essential that the location be affordable and, in

the early stages, flexible. Church plants burdened with heavy rents or mortgages will be reluctant to give away members to launch new churches. Expensive construction projects often sap the energy of the believers and can become prestige objects, distracting from more central ministries of evangelism and discipleship.

Flexibility is also essential to emerging movements. Long-term leases, contracts, or purchases can prevent a church from responding as new opportunities arise or needs change. A good alternative may be renting a public building on an hourly basis. Community centers, schools, hotel conference rooms, cinemas, concert halls, and recreational centers may be options. In rural areas, simple church buildings can often be constructed with local materials that are inexpensive and easily replaceable, but in urban centers that is seldom the case. Whenever the impression is given that to be a true church a congregation must have its own building, church multiplication will advance no faster than funds for property can be raised—and that is usually very slow.

### *Deterrent 2: Making Church Planting Dependent on Formally Educated, Paid Church Planters*

This deterrent may come as a surprise, but it is perhaps the greatest obstacle to multiplication. There is simply never enough money to pay the increasing number of workers needed once a movement begins. Formal education of church planters, which typically takes several years at a Bible school or seminary, is not in and of itself bad. But it will take too long,

and there will never be enough graduates to become church planters for a growing movement. It can also create the impression that an untrained layperson cannot or should not lead a church plant. The Western churches' clerical history and attachment to traditions are reasons that few organic movements are emerging in the West (Payne 2003). Church-planting movements normally rely on bivocational lay, local church planters and on informal (modeling and mentoring) and nonformal (church-based training and workshops) training methods rather than formal institutional education. They emphasize biblical understanding, character building, and practical ministry skills over theoretical knowledge. This is the kind of training that Nevius implemented in China and that was later adopted in Korea (Nevius 1958).

Church planting as a layperson or "tentmaker" is no easy task. Often lay-led churches remain small, but if they continually reproduce, then overall the movement will continue to grow. Lay workers who are less educated need continual encouragement and must receive ongoing training and biblical instruction, especially if they are relatively new believers. Otherwise the movement will be weak and eventually plateau or wither. As it grows, there will be increasing need for educated leaders who can provide theological guidance and depth. But making the expansion of the movement dependent on such persons creates false expectations and slows the momentum.

The Asociación Cristiana Colombiana calls its church planters *missionaries*. They have little theological education but serve with the hearts of lions. They sustain themselves through whatever employment they can find or raise minimal

financial support in order to work as evangelists and disciplers but receive no outside subsidies. When a fellowship of about thirty adults and young people is formed, the search for a pastor begins, and the missionary moves on. This pattern can be repeated time and time again. Another example comes from Ethiopia. "Between 1993 and 1996 the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EEC-MY) grew by 80%, and such phenomenal growth is due mainly to the commitment and witness of her voluntary ministries" (Gobena 1997, 15). These churches are what Iteffa Gobena calls "lay ministry churches."

One of Garrison's ten common factors of CPMs is that they are lay led, and one of his Ten Commandments for CPMs is to train *all believers* to evangelize, disciple, and start churches. "There are no passengers in Church Planting Movements; everyone is crew and expected to work" (2004a, 86).

### *Deterrent 3: Dependence on Outside Resources*

Outside resources such as funding, financial support of church workers, equipment donations, or building projects can be a great boost to a church plant. But great caution must also be exercised to prevent the establishment of a precedent that is not reproducible and sustainable locally. This point is illustrated in the experience of Steve Saint, son of missionary martyr Nate Saint. He documents some striking examples of multiplication stumbling blocks among the Waodani. They had stopped building new bamboo "God houses" with thatched roofs. They explained that after a team came in to construct a better God house using a cement block foundation, "they

concluded that only foreigners are able to build proper God houses, so foreigners should build all of them" (Saint 2001, 55).

Unwise use of resourses can inhibit church multiplication in several ways. First, outside resources are limited, and sooner or later they will end. If church planting is dependent on them, then church planting will also end. If multiplication is the goal, church planting must eventually proceed on the basis of local resources.

Second, the impression can easily be given that it is impossible to plant a church without outside sponsors and funding. Believers can end up excusing themselves from launching new church plants because they lack the sponsors that they suppose are necessary. They have no alternative models of how to do it apart from outside resourcing.

Third, when outside resources are used indiscriminately to launch a church plant, it is not unusual for the congregation to assume that outside resources should also sustain the church, according to the motto "The mission built it; the mission needs to maintain it." Stories abound of well-intentioned building projects sponsored by a mission or partner church, where the local congregation could not even afford to pay the utilities, much less multiply such churches! The patron-client relationship can quickly become the pattern for the church and mission (or sponsor), and this rarely leads to multiplication. In chapter 18 we will return to the question of resources in church planting and suggest some positive uses of outside resources.

**Church Multiplication: From Generation to Generation**

In the first generation of church multiplication (starting the first church), apostolic church planters must, out of necessity, model church-planting practices for local apprentices. In the second generation they work alongside the local leaders, who, having participated in the first plant, are able take the lead. In the third generation, new leaders are learning from their peers, using contextualized approaches, while the missionaries observe and intervene only when called on. If the multiplication takes place successfully, by the fourth generation the missionaries will have released the local leaders to continue the multiplication. They can advise, as needed, through coaching visits. When reproduction has taken place over three generations without the outside agency or its resources, then the DNA is set and reproduction is built into it. Furthermore, since the reproduction comes from leaders and systems that are home grown, the fourth generation can be considered truly indigenous.

The final word has not been written on indigenous principles and church multiplication. The few high-quality studies we have are often neglected. It is hard to go from descriptions of movements to best practices, especially when the contexts vary so greatly. Yet if these principles and best practices are applied in context, with much care and prayer, they can contribute to church multiplication in many more areas of the world until Christ returns.