

Partnerships and Resources in Church Planting

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The concept of partnerships in missions, although greatly in vogue, is far from new. For example, in the eighteenth century John Williams took the gospel to the Pacific Islands and established a base on the island of Rarotonga. In the years that followed he translated the Bible into Rarotongan, developed a training center, and built a vessel to transport evangelistic teams of Rarotongans. “Under his supervision, evangelism was carried out almost entirely by native teachers, most of whom had very limited training. . . . Nevertheless, they courageously left their homes and tribal security, and entered into strange surroundings and learned unfamiliar languages, risking their lives to bring the gospel to their fellow islanders” (Tucker 1983, 211). This partnership was a key factor in the evangelization of the South Seas and, by 1834, only eleven years after he landed on Rarotonga, “no island of importance within 2,000 miles of Tahiti had been left unvisited” (Hardman 1978). Making disciples from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth has frequently given rise to a wide variety of international and intercultural partnerships.

The gospel must travel from one people group to another, and it only makes sense that the recently evangelized collaborate with those who brought them the gospel to reach

other unevangelized groups. Furthermore, no church or association of churches has access to all the unreached people groups of the world or enough resources and wisdom to fulfill the Great Commission on its own. Christopher Little observes, “The International Partnership Movement (IPM) has debatably become the most influential force affecting the global church today. . . . It is gaining more momentum as organizations, churches, and individuals, both Western and non-Western, are jumping on board” (2005, 2). This is largely attributable to the globalization of missionary efforts and the maturing of new sending nations from the Southern Hemisphere. The new missionaries often want to work in creative collaboration with existing Western missionary organizations from a position of equality and respect. Paul Gupta, writing primarily about the situation in India, underlines the value of such collaboration: “As a trainer, consultant, and facilitator, [an expatriate] may serve the national church to develop a church planting movement, or to equip that movement with essential leadership skills and resources to grow mature, dynamic Christians and churches. As expatriate churches and mission organizations adjust their vision and *redefine their role to partner with national churches, they may have a greater impact for the kingdom of God than was ever possible through ‘pioneer’ efforts*” (Gupta and Lingenfelter 2006, 198, emphasis added).

Partnerships include efforts such as short-term teams, compassion and relief efforts, and financial assistance to national workers. Today partnerships appear in many forms:

- an expatriate missionary alongside national workers
- cooperation between mission agencies from various nations
- international congregation-to-congregation partnerships
- local churches sending international short-term teams to partner with missionaries or local churches
- direct support of national workers by a local church or mission agency
- collaborative efforts between associations or denominations

However, partnerships in mission are so commonly and sometimes uncritically practiced that they can produce unintended negative consequences. We will look at diverse types of partnerships, common dangers, and some “best practices” to avoid disappointments and the misuse of God’s resources in global church planting.

Definitions and Assumptions

In this chapter we focus on partnerships that intentionally pursue church planting. A *church-planting partnership* is a voluntary collaborative association to plant one or more churches. When such a partnership is healthy, it contributes to the reproduction of healthy indigenous churches through the sharing of resources and ideas in complementary relationships of mutual respect and trust.[1] We explore various types of partnerships that integrate cooperative discipling and compassionate social action and contribute to the multiplication of healthy kingdom communities (see chapter 19).

All churches can be involved in partnership. With many churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America sending missionaries, the language of *sending and receiving* must be used and heard in an entirely new light. The *sending church versus receiving church* paradigm falls short because it gives the impression that some churches remain receiving churches indefinitely. The language of partnership breaks down this false dichotomy. For the sake of simplicity, we will use the term *expatriate* for the partner who travels cross-culturally and *local* for the partner where the new church is being planted. Expatriate church planters involved in the partnership will be called the *missionary team*.

Biblical and Practical Reasons

There are some convincing biblical reasons for partnering in missions. The acceleration and advance of the Great Commission must remain the primary goal. Paul and Timothy could count on the Philippians in their effort to reach other communities with the gospel (Phil. 4:10–18), and Paul expected the church in Rome to help him take the gospel to Spain after he had visited it for a while (Rom. 15:24). Partnerships facilitate the planting of new kingdom communities by strategically bringing together complementary gifts and resources.

Partnerships also have a qualitative impact by demonstrating reciprocal care, respect, and support. The Philippians demonstrated generosity by giving sacrificially (Phil. 4:10–19) and sending Epaphroditus to care for Paul's physical needs (2:25–30). Paul in turn sent Epaphroditus home to alleviate their concern (2:28) and encouraged them with his letter. The partnership between the Pauline team and Gentile churches to bring famine relief to the Jerusalem church was also intended to build greater unity between Jewish and Gentile churches (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9).^[2]

When partnerships are healthy, they empower rather than control. Paul implies that he avoided baptizing many Corinthian believers so that they should not form a Pauline party (1 Cor. 1:14–15). The leaders of the Jewish church chose not to impose their cultural norms on the Gentile churches (Acts 15). No one should have to sacrifice their cultural identity to be part of a partnership. The goal is that both entities, although different, preserve their cultural distinctives, learn from each other, and

contribute something significant to the common goal according to their respective abilities.

These voluntary collaborative associations use diverse gifts, resources, and ideas *synergistically*. Paul incorporated into new teams the strengths and cultural savvy of coworkers recruited from churches he had previously established.^[3] Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 lists several benefits of partnership: greater returns, protection, help in time of need, warmth, and strength. Furthermore, the mandate to be wise stewards of time, talent, and treasure calls partners to regularly evaluate their kingdom impact and fruitfulness (Luke 16:8–12).

Other Partnership Benefits

Working together helps to overcome the enormity of the task of world evangelization and permits good stewardship of the diverse resources needed for so great a task. This becomes even more important when we consider the rise of new agents in world evangelization. At the turn of the twenty-first century the number of missionaries from the Southern Hemisphere approached that of traditional Western churches (Jaffarian 2004) or may even have surpassed it (Keyes 2003). Also, the practical matters of training, deployment, and ongoing outreach can be more effectively addressed through the skillful cooperation of everyone involved.

Partnerships can also function as learning communities. Those from newer sending nations offer fresh perspectives, additional energy, and greatly needed personnel but seek to learn from the experience of established missionary organizations in areas such as developing support structures and care for long-term effectiveness. The flow of ideas and strategies is increasingly going from East to West (e.g., cell and house church movements, spiritual warfare, ways of reaching postmodern pagans), as can be seen by the example in case study 18.1.

Partnerships allow more personnel to be involved. “Short-term mission is, paradigmatically, a form of collaborative partnership in witness and service with Christians who are already present locally” (Priest and Priest 2008, 66). Thus short-term missions (STMs) expose literally millions of Christians to cross-cultural service and witness. Historian Eliseo Vilchez

sees enormous potential in this volunteer movement: “In the context of religious globalization, STMs arise as one of the strongest instruments of contemporary mission and of the religious transformation that the whole world is experiencing” (quoted in Paredes 2007, 250). Cross-cultural experiences and relationships broaden a person’s perspective and break down stereotypes.[4]

Case Study 18.1

Partnership as a Learning Community

An American church planter worked in Central Asia for seven years without a single convert in spite of his experience, dedication, and support from churches back home. He was successful in developing many friends among Uzbeks but brokenhearted to the point of tears because none had come to faith in Christ. A Korean missionary joined him. This man had fewer resources but greater boldness and a deeper understanding of traditional cultures. He explained that by making so many friends the American was failing to live up to Uzbek expectations of friendship and hospitality. The two set aside friendship evangelism to focus on finding receptive “men of peace” (Luke 10:6) and initiated spiritual discussions with them intentionally and immediately. This approach was the key to unlocking several homes for the gospel and starting two church plants. Several more new churches began in these homes because Bible studies with the “first respondents” in each village were done openly to allay suspicions and over time other family members joined in. The Korean missionary understood the cultural patterns and helped the American to adapt his approach. On the other hand, the American brought the resources of a team and was able to take the lead in the establishing phase. The value of partnership as a learning missional community should not be underestimated.

The long-term contribution of these STM partnerships to church multiplication cannot be taken for granted, however. Most trips last less than two weeks; most teams are made up of inexperienced youth and target countries with tourist appeal (Priest and Priest 2008). Since very few teams go to places in the 10/40 Window,^[5] the net effect is, at best, to strengthen existing ministries rather than to expand into new unreached areas (ibid.). Nevertheless, we believe that strengthening the quality of STMs and designing them in the context of long-term church-planting partnerships can bring about positive lasting contributions. Practical suggestions will be given throughout this chapter.

It should be noted as well that the contribution of kingdom partnerships goes beyond functional benefits. When partnerships palpably demonstrate Christ's love before the world, they serve as testimony to the power of the gospel and constitute a sign that the kingdom is at work. Sameh Maurice expresses their intrinsic theological value: "We believe very much in partnership. We believe in the oneness of the Body of Christ; that a local church by herself can do very little. Churches together can do more and more. [We believe] that the united Body of Christ can do the impossible; [it] can do what Christ Himself can do. This is why we invite the church world-wide to partner with us in many projects" (Maurice 2005).^[6]

Types of Partnerships

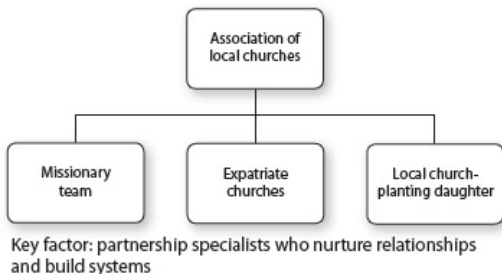
Church-planting partnerships are diverse and dynamic. They are living things and should be treated as such. Each is shaped by a distinct vision, the available resources, and the maturity and giftedness of those involved. Some add more players as they evolve. Their structure is determined by the number and identity of the partners. Most are between two (dyadic partnership) or three parties (tripartite partnership), but some involve more than three (complex partnership).

Dyadic partnerships, also called congregation-to-congregation, link a local church with an expatriate church or a missionary team. These are the simplest, most common type. Many agreements to send STM teams fall in this category. These teams bring added energy, credibility, and resources at critical moments of the church-planting effort, helping the new church overcome natural growth barriers. These are usually long-term collaborative efforts in which the missionary functions initially as “broker” and then unselfishly serves the interests of partnership as an encourager, adviser, and problem solver. Carl Brown’s (2007) research demonstrated that the competence and commitment of this person has a great impact on the success of the partnership and church-planting project.[7]

We call a collaborative effort that involves more than two associates a *complex partnership* (see figure 18.1). The effort may bring together several expatriate churches and a local missionary team to help an international church-planting project. Usually the number of partners grows with the scale of

the project. Sometimes the partnership is between regional entities. For example, a group comprising dozens of North American Evangelical Free churches (a district) is partnering with an association of Mexican churches in many church projects, using STM teams for training, evangelism, and construction to strengthen existing plants and launch new ones. An experienced missionary couple serves as facilitator and catalyst by preparing the projects, orienting the teams, and participating in many of the projects.

Figure 18.1
A Complex Partnership



Interdenominational coalitions of local churches that partner together to support a church-planting project have also been

formed. For example, in the greater Milwaukee area a consortium of several churches have joined together to support work in Indonesia. In order for this to function well, the facilitators must be specialists who view this as a primary ministry. They develop tools, best practices, and systems to see these sometimes complicated partnerships through difficult stages to positive church-planting outcomes.

Partnerships can also be distinguished by their ministry emphasis. Even those that focus on church strengthening and reproduction may utilize a wide variety of means. Evangelistic and discipleship efforts are often part of a church-planting partnership but they are not the only, nor necessarily the primary form of involvement. Sidebar 18.1 lists just some of the ways that STM teams can partner with a church-planting effort.

Guidelines for Healthy Partnerships

Church-planting partnerships have great potential, but they are costly in terms of manpower and energy. Thus they should be handled wisely, in accordance with the following guidelines.

Have a clear purpose. The primary objective must be prayerfully agreed upon. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit often accomplishes things that neither partner had expected. Partners International found that to increase the effectiveness of its partnerships, it needed a greater focus on the end result of the partnership, so it began joint evaluations of the qualitative and quantitative fruit of the partnership (Downey 2006).

Clarify expectations. The nature of the partnership, financial arrangements, decision making, and a host of other matters should be openly discussed at the outset. Partners from different cultures may understand the meaning and purpose of a partnership differently. For example, more relational cultures may view the partnership as a collaborative friendship, whereas those from an urban business culture would see it primarily in terms of the church-planting task (Brown 2008). Oscar Muriu (2007) points out that Americans tend to be confident and direct and like to solve problems, while Africans tend to be more reserved and indirect, thus the partnership suffers unless American STM members value the opinions of the local people over their preconceived ideas.

Ways to Involve Planting

- Construction projects: church buildings, playgrounds, housing, community centers
- Community service such as digging wells, clean-up efforts, agricultural development, assisting in schools, orphanages, hospitals
- Neighborhood canvassing, literature distribution
- Street theater, drama, sports outreach, pantomime, music, showing films
- Evangelistic English-language camps, English tutoring
- Medical and Short-Term Mission Efforts in Church dental clinics, community health education
- Presentations in local schools
- Camping and camp ministries
- Leadership development, teaching, training seminars
- Prayer ministry, prayer walks
- Professional development seminars such as continuing education for doctors, schoolteachers, business leaders, development workers
- Environmental projects
- Logistical and technical assistance with large evangelistic campaigns

Remain flexible. Relationships evolve, circumstances change, and unexpected developments arise. A written partnership agreement may be viewed by one partner as a temporary guide that is tacitly open to renegotiation as situations change, while the other may see it in more rigid contractual terms. Even when expectations are clearly spelled out, arrangements may need to be adapted to suit new realities. Fundamental principles should not be compromised, but

flexibility in nonessentials will contribute to greater effectiveness and satisfaction on all sides. Overly stringent policies and timelines should be avoided.

Include a bicultural mediator. In a fallen world we can expect unmet expectations to cause tension. And where there are cultural, linguistic, economic, and other differences, the potential for misunderstanding is great. Inexperienced partners often underestimate this challenge. Again, a bicultural and bilingual mediator, such as a mature missionary, is invaluable to negotiate the relationship, help each party understand the other's idiosyncrasies, and fairly represent both parties.

Grow the partnership with patience. In Spanish *relación de socios* (relationship of associates), the expression used for partnership, implies a peer relationship of equality and trust. Some North Americans tend to be very results oriented and can have unrealistic expectations about how quickly trust can be developed and how long it takes to plant a healthy church.[8] Partners should take time to get acquainted, share vision, and build trust. Then they can build on that foundation with mutual respect, appreciation, and understanding. Partnerships that have built a bridge of trust and established healthy communication patterns are more likely to survive.

Seek to empower and make the benefit mutual. “In true partnership, each member seeks to build and empower the other” (Hiebert and Larsen 1999, 59). Partners International defines partnership as “collaboration without control” (Downey 2006, 200) and describes its ethos as “empowering locally-led ministries to carry out God’s work in culturally-appropriate ways in partnerships of mutual trust” (ibid., 202).

The goal of an empowering partnership is always to give with an open hand, looking to the common goal. Any attitude of superiority, control, or paternalism will do great damage, but a two-way exchange of resources, strengths, insights, hospitality, and values helps to keep a partnership healthy and interdependent. The ultimate focus is on God's glory and the growth of his kingdom.

Establish a fair decision-making process. Sometimes the partner with more resources can intentionally or unintentionally dominate decision making.[9] Local believers may feel powerless for fear that if they propose a different course of action the support they count on will be withdrawn or the partnership will be dissolved. Or they may acquiesce but not follow through. Decision-making processes should respect the interests of all partners and guard the integrity of the local work from inappropriate outside influence (Collins 1995).

Exercise wisdom regarding financial assistance. One of the most common sources of conflict in partnerships is the use of money. Difficulties may come from an overly cautious and stingy spirit on the part of the wealthier partner, or unhealthy dependencies can result when financial subsidies are unwisely administered or dominate the relationship. While the investment and benefit of the partners need not be equal and should not be compared, it is expected that all partners will make sacrifices and reap kingdom dividends. We'll return to this point below.

Practical Steps for Each Partnership Stage

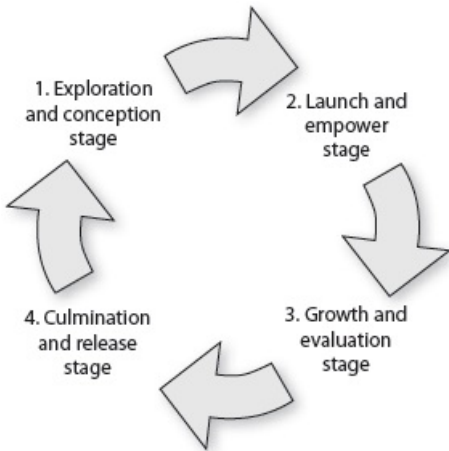
Partnerships, like most relationships, have a life span. Healthy ones are entered into prudently and concluded graciously. Even though the joint project ends, the relationship continues. But that relationship changes as the partners release each other from their mutual commitments related to the church-planting effort. This is why we call the final phase “culmination and release” (see figure 18.2).

In the *exploration and conception stage* churches decide to explore the formation of a church-planting partnership. Partnerships can be initiated by an established church that wants to send STM teams cross-culturally or by the leader of a new ministry seeking outside help to launch it. Alternatively, a third-party missionary organization, seeing the benefit of partnerships, may bring together a local church and an expatriate church (or churches) that have compatible goals, values, and interests.

The choice of a partner should be made prayerfully, based on clear goals and criteria. Relational compatibility between leaders is also important. Potential partners should seek to understand each other’s culture, situation, and history. Three factors that commonly contribute to a precipitous and unhealthy partnership are a pressure to perform well, the overwhelming needs of the work, and the adrenaline rush of a new and exciting experience (Lederleitner 2007). It is preferable not to make promises and agreements until sufficient common ground is evident.

Figure 18.2

Stages in Partnerships



During the *launch and empower stage*, the focus moves from selecting the right partner to establishing common goals and plans. Dialogue should be facilitated by the kind of bicultural mediator described earlier. The point persons representing each partner should also be competent and mature people of unquestionable integrity who ideally have

had some prior cross-cultural experience.

An initial trial project is conducted. Afterward the facilitator and point persons debrief together. The joint evaluation serves to affirm the partnership, make adjustments to it, or bring it to a gracious conclusion. Between STM trips, partners keep in touch and work on the next steps in their common effort. Ways to sustain the partnership between STM trips should be explored. These may include sustained personal correspondence, extended ministry assignments, and visits that go in both directions.

In the *growth and evaluation stage*, the church plant takes shape and a local leadership team emerges. Partnerships require energy, attention, and flexibility—especially in this phase. The role of STM team members changes as they seek to complement and enhance the work of the local disciples. A focus on the purpose is maintained by asking, “What is needed to take the church plant to the next level?” and, “How do we overcome obstacles and move the work forward together?” STM teams should encourage the new church toward stewardship of gifts and resources. If outside resources have been used, a gradual transition to reliance on local resources must occur in this phase. Changes, problems, disappointments, and unfulfilled expectations are addressed immediately and openly (remembering that in some cultures this is more difficult). The facilitator and point persons consider how setbacks can be redeemed and become learning experiences. During the joint evaluations even the smallest advances are underlined and affirmed.

In the *culmination and release stage*, there is a healthy

rhythm of cooperative ministry. This pattern may involve repeated seasonal ministries, such as English-language camps in the summer and leadership training during the winter months. Relationships are increasingly comfortable, and responsibility for ministry plans now lies squarely on the shoulders of the local ministry team. Fellowship is enjoyed, mutual respect and accountability are bearing fruit, and victories are celebrated.

However, just as the partnership appears to climax, a healthy conclusion must be prepared. If there is no plan to complete the project, inertia will most likely lead to frustration and an unpleasant termination. A sense of abandonment can arise unless relationships are affirmed and continued even as the joint mission comes to a close. The partners may cooperate in planting yet another daughter church or join hands in an entirely new work. The partnership can evolve into a mutually edifying sister-church relationship by means of informal friendships, occasional visits, and special cooperative projects.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Partnerships

Healthy partnerships are not without cost. Nor are partnerships always successful. Just as conflict between Paul and Barnabas led to a painful parting of ways (Acts 15:36–41), so today church-planting partnerships have the potential for both fruitfulness and frustration. It is wise to establish early in the relationship a pattern of evaluation in which all parties participate. It is helpful to draw out concerns by making evaluation natural and constructive criticism safe. We have seen that in church planting the benefits are multifaceted and come from the relationship: mutual learning and growth as well as visible results. Honest assessments should take all of these into consideration.

As we stated earlier, every partnership is unique; however, certain common criticisms emerge, and we have summarized and grouped them according to their source. Here they are from three perspectives: those of expatriate churches, local indigenous churches, and traditional missionaries.

Perspective of Expatriate Churches

Besides wanting to advance church planting and to increase their own involvement in missions, expatriate churches often expect personal growth to take place in the lives of STM members. Some even think of STM trips as a type of boot camp that transforms lives. Randy Friesen (2005) found, however, that the greatest cognitive and attitudinal changes occurred during the first short-term experience but that regression occurred in most cases after a year.[10] Strangely, most participants experienced a *decline* in spiritual disciplines, moral purity, and local church involvement in the year following their mission trip. Likewise, Kurt Ver Beek's (2006) study of STM construction projects in Honduras found that there was no evidence of significant change in participants' lives or giving patterns as a result of the experience. Friesen (2005) found that these trips are more likely to enhance a participant's practice of spiritual disciplines if a sufficient foundation is already there. So it would be a mistake to send people who are not spiritually mature on STM trips in the hope of jolting them toward maturity through exposure to difficult conditions.[11] If participants are not sharing their faith and exercising a positive influence at home, it would be ill-advised to expect them to do so in a foreign context. The rule of thumb is, the greater the maturity at the outset of an STM, both spiritual and personal, the greater the potential of positive impact will be. Also, lasting changes in participants are more likely when guidance, debriefing, follow-up, and other subsequent service opportunities are added.

Local Indigenous Church Perspective

Often the local churches are enthusiastic about the contributions of lay volunteers from other countries. They come at their own cost, demonstrate sacrificial service, and make significant contributions. They may help to attract unbelievers, use their professional skills, improve community relationships, offer leadership training, and develop infrastructure (buildings, roads, wells, bridges). At times the expatriate partners contribute financially even after the STM trip. They may sponsor orphans, contribute to educational or medical projects, offer scholarships to seminary students, and financially support church planters.

Robert Priest (2007) surveyed 551 evangelical pastors in Lima, Peru, and found that 58 percent had hosted STM teams and those that did were overwhelmingly positive about the experience. He summarizes, “When short-term mission trips are underpinned by humble service, sacrificial stewardship, and wise leadership, they potentially make important contributions to the global church” (187). STM participants’ primary contributions were not in evangelism but in resource sharing, building credibility, and opening doors.[12]

Oscar Muriu offers a candid counterbalancing perspective. He finds that STM members are often poorly informed about the world, overly self-confident, ill-prepared for cross-cultural ministry, and as a result less effective than they could be. “Short-term experiences have their place, but they need to be more carefully constructed. All too often a church says: ‘We’d like to come for a short term experience.’ Then they say, in so many words, ‘We’re going to do A, B, C, D, and we’re in

charge” (Muriu 2007, 97). He prefers to call these trips *short-term learning opportunities*.^[13] Latin Americans have not held back their criticisms either. The following is representative of several contributors to a journal issue devoted to the matter: “There is a latent and, in my humble opinion, inevitable danger of ‘religious tourism’ that will happen to the extent that prior preparation and subsequent assessment of STM groups is disregarded. That is, the further we are from serious planning and coordination with local churches, the greater the risk of investing millions of dollars in ‘religious tourism’ that could well be used in more effective ways for establishing the Kingdom” (Cerron 2007, 31).

Traditional Missionary Perspective

Traditional missionaries[14] may have mixed feelings about STM trips and the partnerships that sustain them. They see the educational and motivational value of exposing thousands of people to the country and cause to which they have dedicated their lives. Occasionally a participant returns for a longer-term stay or helps to send others.[15] At times traditional missionaries find themselves in the position of brokers caught between conflicting interests or goals. They can also feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work that STM trips require. Like leaders of the local churches, they find that STM members need cultural orientation and practical preparation and feel responsible to help them succeed.

Some missionaries are also concerned about the amount of resources used by STM that would otherwise go to longer-term church planting or development efforts. “Short-term trips, lasting two weeks or less, drew about 1.6 million Americans to foreign mission fields last year, according to a survey by Robert Wuthnow, a sociologist of religion at Princeton University” (MacDonald 2006). The median cost of a participant’s STM trip abroad is somewhere between \$1,000 and \$1,500 (Priest and Priest 2008, 57). This would mean that a whopping \$1.6–2.4 billion are spent on STM trips from the United States yearly. Ver Beek’s (2006) study found that the average cost of a home built by STM teams was \$30,000, while a home of the same quality built by local Christian Honduran organizations costs only \$2,000. Such figures give us pause and require us to consider the stewardship in such endeavors. The impact on giving to missions is impossible to calculate,

since in most cases participants contribute themselves, receive help from family, and raise the balance of the funds from their own pool of friends and relatives (ibid.). Furthermore, some STM participants will become donors to long-term efforts and recruit others.

Another concern is the amateurism of volunteers on STM teams. The criticism is warranted to the degree that it is provoked by the immaturity of participants or their lack of preparation for the task. But Garrison (2004a, 261–66) reminds us that the word *amateur* literally means *one who does it out of love* rather than for pay and that many volunteers are highly skilled professionals who can relate to local believers and residents through and because of their career. “This conveys a powerful message to the new believers” (ibid., 262).

Concluding Comments

These diverse perspectives, taken together, encourage us to channel this lay-volunteer movement toward greater long-term effectiveness. More is not necessarily better. STM ministries should be seen as a supplement rather than a substitute for traditional church-planting missions. The consensus seems to be that partnerships using STM teams are beneficial if they contribute to long-term goals already in place and are well managed by partnership coordinators so that the expectations are clear and the long-term missionary staff is not sidetracked or overwhelmed. Better selection, orientation, and training are all needed. Costs need to be carefully examined and managed.

The STM movement was not planned by the missionary establishment and will not be curtailed by its reservations. We must not forget that, arguably, most New Testament church planters were in a sense short-term missionaries who had other means of livelihood. Both short-and long-term missionaries can be dismissive or inconsiderate of each other. When all partners recognize each other's strengths and use them collaboratively toward a clear mission, the greatest fruit is borne.

There are times when Christian leaders and churches should move ahead without looking to form a partnership. If STMs become the *modus operandi* of missions, undesirable partnerships may be created and bold kingdom initiatives may be stifled. However, healthy, empowering partnerships bring joy even where there are challenges. They exude energy, motivate participants, and produce visible results. No partnership is without its problems, but healthy ones produce a cooperative synergy that allows partners to grow and become

more effective for the kingdom.

Financial Factors and Church Multiplication

“Church Planting Movements thrive on indigeneity. They must have internal momentum if they are to rapidly multiply through a people group. One of the surest ways to cripple a Church Planting Movement is to link reproduction to foreign resources” (Garrison 2004a, 267). What financial practices will contribute to fresh waves of church multiplication?

Relying on Lay Workers

Church multiplication occurs most rapidly where church planting does not require theologically trained and ordained pastors but is led by teams of lay or bivocational workers. As we saw in chapter 15, this is the New Testament pattern. Not that the apostles did not receive help from established churches—they did. But they did not rely on that help as a precondition to church planting. The Moravian missionary movement exemplifies what God can do through workers trained in local churches. “The proportion of [Moravian] missionaries to home communicants has been estimated at 1:60 compared with 1:5000 in the rest of Protestantism” (Norman 1978, 676).

Lay movements are still possible today. The fastest-growing grassroots movement in Peru at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Movimiento Misionero Mundial, attributes part of its remarkable growth to the fact that it works with the people and resources that God provides locally. MMM church planters begin with house churches led by lay workers and offer leveraging funds for biblical training or meeting places only on rare occasions when workers distinguish themselves as effective evangelists and shepherds. The financial help is temporary, and the new church body must rent or purchase its building. Rodolfo Cruz adds that freedom from dependence on outside resources has allowed the churches to finance movement-wide projects like television broadcasts, missionary efforts, and regional evangelistic campaigns using predominantly local funds.^[16] This does not mean that pastors should never be salaried but that this will take place at a later

stage, when the local body of believers is in a position to call and support a full-time worker. Other churches may choose to continue to be led by bivocational elders and invest their funds in church extension and missions.

Apostolic Lifestyle

Extension works can usually be started by local teams of lay workers who do not have to uproot their families and find other jobs. However, to launch a cross-cultural work in a more distant region, church planters must often move and be supported by churches or find other employment. In many countries there is not a strong enough financial base to support the missionaries who are needed, so new paradigms of missionary support must be explored. Planters must also adjust their expectations, embrace a simple and sacrificial lifestyle, and be willing to find an additional source of revenue if needed—following the example of Jesus and his apostles.

Peruvian pastor Samuel Nieva speaks of the proliferation of grassroots churches among the poor of Lima, in places where one would least expect them: “They don’t start thinking of all the problems, that they need benches, a pulpit . . . they just start to build. Money can be raised through ‘polladas’ [chicken roasts], clothing sales and other devices” (Berg and Pretiz 1996, 217). Church-planting movements grow in the midst of subsistence living and strong opposition (Garrison 2004a). This is convincing evidence that church multiplication need not be resource driven.

On the other hand, the paucity of resources should not be an excuse for inadequate preparation. Initial seed money can make a big difference. When asked, “Why do church planters fail most often in Latin America?” many church-planting leaders mentioned a lack of funds and lack of denominational support as primary causes. Preparation and planning should never be a substitute for sacrifice and dependence on God.

Many supporting churches cannot rely on fixed giving, nor can they afford inflexible budgets with financial commitments to buildings, salaries, and programs. They need to operate on limited and unstable assets, with flexibility and a high degree of ownership by members, constantly determining what God is calling them to do and then praying and working together to bring it to pass. In chapter 4 we used the example of a small grassroots movement in Colombia that supports workers without outside subsidy. It has found creative ways to support church planters who live sacrificially on an average of \$300–400 U.S. dollars a month. Many remain single by choice. Some live in simple quarters attached to a church building or live with church families. Most receive about one-third of their support from family and friends, one-third from their local church, and one-third from a joint missions fund to which all the churches contribute. Others have part-time work.

Postponing Costly Programs and Purchase of Buildings

Great wisdom is needed when a young church is considering the use of outside funds to purchase or erect a building. Historically, churches have not needed real estate to flourish. Missionaries who come from congregations that own real estate sometimes assume that buildings are an important ingredient of church life. However, new believers in some societies are rejected by family and lose their jobs when they follow Jesus. Others live from day to day, growing most of their own food, and cannot afford a home, let alone a church

building. Thus church planting can slow or comes to a halt when there is an expectation that each Christian community should have a special building of its own. The organic reproduction of the church is compromised. This does not mean that meeting places are unimportant. The healthy pattern is for churches to start out with what they have and as they grow in maturity and means, acquire property later. In church multiplication movements, where church buildings are used at all, they are generally simple structures erected with local materials and resources. Otherwise the attitude can quickly develop that only outsiders can build churches and that locally constructed church buildings are inferior.[17]

Teaching Stewardship of Life and Resources

Good stewardship of life and resources will be part of the DNA of any healthy church-planting movement. All along the way, giving will be an important part of any church plant. The giving of self and of material gifts, the sacrifice of luxuries, and the sharing of resources are all necessary. Pastor Oscar Muriu of Nairobi Chapel warns of importing approaches that are primarily resource driven and therefore not a model that can be used by resource-poor nations. “We can design new models that do not depend on money” (Muriu 2007, 96).

The first church-planting movement points to community practices that cultivate the generosity and stewardship needed to empower the mission regardless of economic status:

1. Community is real, built on relationships of love and trust (Acts 4:32).
2. Sharing is voluntary, not forced (Acts 4:32).
3. There is an ethos of grace, not law (Acts 4:33).
4. All that Jesus commanded is taught, including stewardship of life and belongings (Matt. 28:20; John 13:14–17).
5. The leaders set an example of generosity (Acts 4:36–37).
6. There is freedom in giving, but honesty is required (Acts 5:1–10).
7. Fairness in distribution is overseen by spiritual servants (Acts 6:1–7).

Outside resources can help and are not antithetical to church multiplication. After all, in the pioneering stage there is no church and all resources—human, strategic, technological, and financial—must come from the outside. But they should be handled with wisdom so that those resources do not stand in the way of the multiplication of healthy, self-supporting, reproducible congregations.

The Sharing of Financial Resources in Church Planting

Strong arguments have been made representing various extremes regarding the use of outside resources in missionary church planting. Some advocate that no financial assistance

should be given from the outset, so that the church does not become dependent on outside finances and learns to sustain and reproduce itself based on local resources. The apostle Paul never brought financial assistance to the churches he planted (Allen 1962a, 49–61), and this has been the practice in most rapidly growing indigenous church-planting movements (Garrison 2004a). Numerous examples can be cited of broken relationships, resentments, misappropriation, manipulation, and hindrance of the advance of the gospel because of financial dependencies and the unwise use of funds.

Others assert no less passionately that the sharing of wealth between congregations is a Christian obligation (e.g., Rowell 2007). Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:13–14, “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.” The traditional three-self goal of self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting has been challenged as a Western pragmatic and individualistic construct not found in the Bible. Financial help is not viewed by these advocates as a necessary evil but rather as a more equitable distribution of resources.

The answer, as in so many such debates, is that both are correct in part. An all-or-nothing, either-or approach will seldom have the best results. We do indeed have an obligation to share wealth and to pool different types of assets for kingdom advance. At the same time, we need to share resources in ways that empower and do not control, in ways that do not create indifference on the part of the recipients or

condescension on the part of the giver. This requires that we keep the larger picture of church multiplication and the advance of the gospel in view.

Furthermore, each situation must be considered individually. Local circumstances, cultural norms, and a variety of other factors must be taken into account when determining the wise use of funds in any given situation. David Maranz (2001) gives an excellent discussion of the complexities of financial matters in Africa. Members of local African cultures have very different views from those of Americans on several key issues: saving and spending, paternalism and partnership, independence versus interdependence, accountability and accounting systems.

Beyond warning of the dangers of dependency or praising the benefits of resource distribution, we want to examine positive practical uses of finances in church-planting partnerships. The question is how to use such resources wisely for the long-term development of the work and demonstrate solidarity as interdependent parts of the global church. Here are seven different ways in which financial aid can be given and corresponding instructions for the wise use of each approach.

Launching Funds

Here assistance is given in order to launch a new effort or movement where local resources are limited. This might be called jump-starting a project (see case study 18.2). Where there are few or no Christians, outside resources in the form of sending a missionary, supporting a national church planter, funding evangelistic efforts, or renting temporary facilities are usually necessary. Initial production of literature, Bibles, or other materials may also be needed. The purchase of simple forms of transportation, such as bicycles or mopeds, for church planters might also fall in this category.

Launching funds are usually limited in both amount and duration. Like the jumper cables used to start an automobile, support is removed once the church plant is “running.” The funds are intended to help start but not to sustain the movement. Normally this kind of funding should go to onetime projects, not to ongoing salaries. If the precedent is set that launching funds are *always* necessary for a church plant to begin, then the growth of the church-planting movement will be limited to the availability of such outside funds. Church-planting movements prosper to the extent that local resources and indigenous ways are found to plant and reproduce churches. So when launching funds are provided, one must consider from the outset how the approach will be locally sustainable and reproducible in the long run. Sometimes launching funds for future church plants can be generated locally in the churches that have already been planted.

Case Study 18.2

Encounter with God Project, Lima, Peru

One of the most impressive and successful examples of funding for a launch was the Encounter with God project of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Lima, Peru. A launching grant of \$300,000 was provided, and a comprehensive evangelistic and church-planting strategy, including local refunding of the project, was implemented. Funds were used for evangelistic outreach, advertising, the purchase of properties, and construction of church buildings (Mangham 1987; Turnidge 1999). The movement grew from one church with 117 members in 1973 to twenty churches and 9,127 members in 1987. By 1997 there were thirty-eight churches with 15,870 members and a weekly attendance of 25,000. Though the Lima project has inspired many similar attempts to launch church-planting movements in other countries, none have matched the remarkable results of the original project.

Lengthening Funds

Lengthening is giving that encourages and extends the giving capacity of local believers. It is most commonly accomplished through some form of matching grants. This has the advantage of stimulating (and ensuring) local ownership and commitment to a project. The matching grant may be 5:1 rather than 1:1, depending on what is realistic in the given context. The important thing is that the local contribution is indeed raised locally—that is, members of the church plant are indeed providing the funds to match the grant and other outside sources are not being tapped for that purpose.

The use of matching-fund grants is suitable for onetime projects such as buildings or the purchase of equipment. Caution should be used so that buildings do not turn into prestige objects of local pastors, or even into a means of stealing congregations, as has occurred in India and other parts of the world.[\[18\]](#)

Matching funds for salaries of local church planters or pastors can quickly become problematic. Such an approach tends to reinforce the expectation that a paid pastor is necessary and will always be provided by outside sources. Church multiplication is threatened when too great an emphasis is placed on buildings or professionally paid workers.

Leveraging Funds

“Leveraged giving” enhances impact and increases return by investing in ministries that in turn influence many other ministries. The most common form of leveraged giving is investment in leadership development. Increasingly, training centers for national church planters are being sponsored. Often these are schools that provide bivocational preparation, that is, vocational training in a trade or skill as well as ministry preparation. Those who complete such training become self-supporting tentmakers who earn income with the trade or occupation they have learned and plant churches alongside of their secular work. Other forms of leveraged giving that serve to advance church planting include the sponsoring of theological education by extension, production of Christian literature, creation of a microenterprise ministry, development of discipleship materials, and Bible translation.

Linking Funds

“Linking giving” makes it possible for newly planted churches to organize and be linked with other churches and Christians regionally, nationally, and internationally. Such projects could include sponsorship of regional church-planting workshops, an area church-planting director or coach, or the travel costs of leaders who meet together for training, fellowship, and encouragement. Support for denominational offices or the international travel of movement leaders would fall into this category. While even budding church-planting movements can normally be expected to cover local expenses through local giving, they rarely have adequate funding for such projects.

Loving Funds

In the final chapter we will revisit the relationship of compassion ministries and church planting. It can and should be symbiotic—that is, they should enhance each other and have a greater impact together than they would separately. Sponsorship of compassion ministries that are associated with a church plant is an important and practical way to demonstrate the love of Christ and the church's commitment to serve the community. The gospel cannot easily be ignored when it is proclaimed in a holistic manner, in word and deed. Compassion projects and their funding should be discussed carefully with local leaders.

A problem can arise when local church leaders discover that outside funds can more easily be raised for compassion ministry than for evangelism or other ministries. For example, the young church might begin to operate an orphanage as a source of income and end up neglecting evangelism and discipleship. Both are legitimate and important, but balance can easily be lost and integrity in use of funds may become compromised (Stanley, Hedlund, and Masih 1986; Yost 1984).

Lending Funds

“Lending giving” occurs when a onetime grant is given to create a revolving fund that finances loans for church-planting projects. Once the finances are secured, it becomes a revolving fund. As funds are borrowed and repaid, they continue to be available to help finance future projects. Most commonly such projects include loans for church buildings or major capital investments. Whatever the project, it must be one that has the promise of generating future funds, so that the loan can be repaid. In less affluent countries repayment rates are seldom 100 percent, and this must be factored into the program.

Loans to finance small industries or microenterprises of local Christians may indirectly benefit a church-planting project but are best managed separately from church-planting funds. Job programs and seed funding for small businesses may be appropriate ministries of economic development. But it is generally best to finance the church and ministry through the gifts and offerings of members and keep business enterprises independent of the direct management and ownership of the church.

Lingering Funds

Lingering funds are subsidies for the church plant that continue indefinitely with no clear plan for reduction. This is a practice that we generally discourage because it usually creates unhealthy dependencies and resentments when the funding must eventually be reduced or discontinued. The reduction of such funding can also create tension and hardship. Frustration is often experienced by both the receiving church and the sponsor. The system of gradually reducing subsidies by an annual percentage (for example, subsidy is reduced 20 percent per year and local believers increase funding 20 percent per year) until the subsidy is discontinued has often worked well in affluent contexts. However, such approaches seldom work harmoniously or effectively when there is significant economic disparity between the partnering churches. But why is financial dependency wrong? Indeed no church should be fully independent of other churches. New Testament examples fall primarily in the categories of occasional financial assistance and famine relief, not ongoing sustenance (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8). Wealth can and should be shared in times of need, but the goal is that each provides for his or her own under normal circumstances (for example, even younger widows were expected to provide for themselves; 1 Tim. 5:8–11).

When we take a practical view, strategic stewardship must be of paramount concern. So long as one church is receiving assistance, those same resources cannot be used to launch new church plants in needier areas. If the goal of reaching the unreached is to be achieved, then every church must be viable

and self-sustaining under normal circumstances so that it can eventually become a giving and sending church. Lingering support is susceptible to sponsor manipulation and to the undermining of local decision making, initiative, and ownership. A survival mentality, or worse, a poverty mindset, can set in. One person has called this an “ecclesiastical welfare system” (Elder 2003).

Concluding Guidelines

We conclude this section on financial resources with a summary of practical guidelines for the strategic investment of outside resources.

Give in ways that eventually lead to church multiplication based on local resources. This means that financial support is focused on short-term projects, training, leadership, and regional coordination in ways that permit a ready transition to locally based leadership and financing. Church plants should learn how to reproduce using local resources.

Prioritize efforts that have no natural local constituency to support the ministry. For example, it is reasonable to expect that even a small, poor congregation with a lay pastor would be able to pay its ongoing expenses through the tithes of its members. Church-planter training centers and compassion ministries, on the other hand, at least in the early phases of a movement, do not have an immediate constituency to support them.

Avoid giving in ways that stifle local initiative or create long-term dependencies. Support of national evangelists and church planters is not the golden key to world evangelization, as some have suggested. The practice is fraught with difficulties and if unwisely carried out can actually hinder a movement (Ott 1993). Such approaches are seldom locally sustainable or reproducible.

Do not give the impression that ministry depends on money, buildings, or paid professionals. Through the history of the church the gospel has advanced under the most adverse circumstances. Full-time paid workers can be very helpful, but

they are not essential to church health and multiplication. The same can be said of church buildings. Some of the most dynamic church-planting movements have been largely lay led using simple means and meeting places. Wealthy churches must be generous without giving the impression that where there is no money ministry cannot progress.

Know the local culture, customs, and needs, and listen to local leaders. Unfortunately, outside financial assistance can lead to dominance by those who understand local needs and customs least. Giving should empower local people, respect their judgment, and be done in ways that consider the needs and objectives of all partners.