

Churches Sending Teams: A Children's Crusade?

OR A GENUINE BLESSING



Develop New Blueprints for Partnership

Bob Blincoe

A few local churches are starting to send their own teams of missionaries, and more will send teams in the future. This could be a great blessing. Yet two unfortunate consequences are emerging from many of these efforts – one foreseen by the late Dr. Donald McGavran, the other by Dr. Ralph Winter. Before churches send a veritable “children’s crusade”¹ of well-meaning but ineffective volunteers to the ends of the earth, they would be wise to keep in mind what could go wrong.



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church in a Muslim country or in India. First question: is it a church of Hindu or Muslim-born believers or only a collection of historically Christian individuals or social outcasts who have “nothing to lose” from joining themselves with you? McGavran describes these sterile churches as

born from “the Mission Station Approach” in which missionaries impose their own culture in a small piece of land and on a small, unproductive segment of society. Yet this kind of church-planting has sometimes been counted as “success”. Too bad. By contrast, McGavran advocates that we “aim for a cluster of growing congregations” because “the great advances of the Church have always come by people movements.”²

1. What could go wrong: “success” by extending familiar forms of church in another culture

The success of American churches in starting daughter churches within their own culture may lead them to presume that the same skills are needed in pioneering new work among, say, Muslims or Hindus. But “extension church-planting” is not *pioneer church-planting*. Cultural characteristics in Islam and Hinduism – arranged marriages, group decision-making, etc. – are vastly unfamiliar to the average church team

heavily laden with Western assumptions. The average church team may indeed succeed in starting a daughter



Bob Blincoe is the U.S. Director of Frontiers and the General Director of the Presbyterian Order for World Evangelization.

2. What could go wrong: failure caused by ignoring the mission structure Paul used for pioneer church-planting

Paul patterned his missionary band after the structure his fellow Pharisees used when they “went to and fro across the earth” making disciples. Paul’s band was task-oriented and accountable to a mission statement: to “preach the gospel where Christ was not named” (Romans 15:20). The band – call it a *sodality* – emerges from the congregation – *modality* – accountable for the task of pioneer church planting. Winter writes, “Paul’s missionary band can be considered a prototype of all subsequent

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missionary endeavors organized out of committed, experienced workers who affiliated themselves as a second decision beyond membership in the first structure.”³

When churches and agencies work together in effective partnership, unreached peoples are deeply blessed.

a team to plant reproducing churches ended up satisfied with offering professional service and raising their families overseas. A mission agency can hold a church accountable and provide coaching to avoid such drift. Local churches are often experts

at “growing the Church where it is.” The structure of a congregation is often well-suited to planting new churches in its familiar culture. However, pioneer church-planting – “going where the Church isn’t” – operates in a parallel universe. The “experts” in growing “churches that look like us” can become clumsy amateurs in the specialty work of pioneer church-planting. In *The Re-Amateurization of Missions* Winter writes of the mixed blessing of the much-heralded Student Volunteer Movement, “One hundred years ago hordes of young people rushed out to the field and did silly, tragic things – and were encouraged by

in creative, effective partnership, good things happen and unreached peoples are deeply blessed. Frontiers and Pioneers and other specialized agencies are coaching congregations to send godly, effective church planting teams. In Frontiers we coach these teams in five areas: Character, Competence, Content, Community, and Commitment. Such coaching gives churches the best chance of joining the few which are planting reproducing foreign churches. Here are some examples of genuine success:⁵

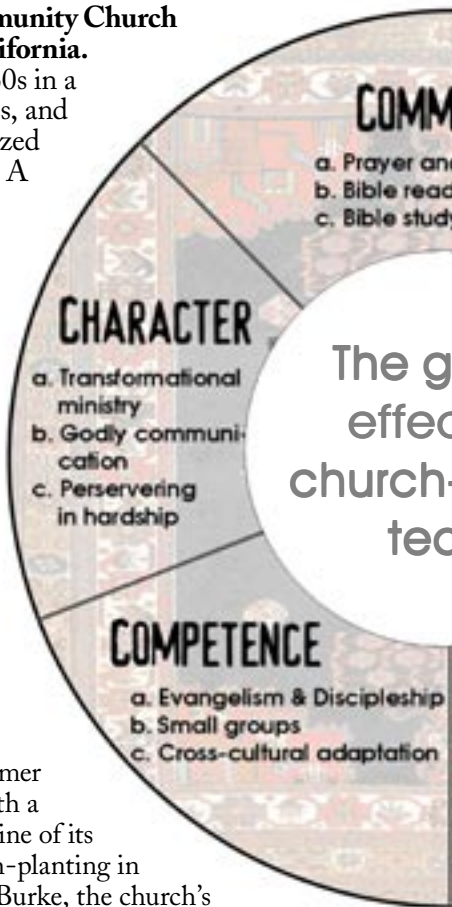
• **Eternal Plains Community Church (EPCC), southern California.**

EPCC began in the 1960s in a home with a few families, and from the outset emphasized cross-cultural missions. A defining moment occurred shortly after the church was founded when Dr. Pat Clemson, a member of the congregation, was martyred in Africa. This event cemented the church’s commitment to God’s purpose of exalting His name at the ends of the earth. EPCC has an experienced church planting team of eight adults working in Central Asia.⁶

• **First Baptist Church, central Texas.**

Last summer this church partnered with a mission agency to send nine of its members to begin church-planting in the Middle East. Mary Burke, the church’s mission pastor, writes, “Partnering with a mission agency provides coaching, logistical support and good accountability for our team.”

• **Christ Church, Arizona.** Last autumn this church sent out a team to a country in the Middle East. A businessman in the church had asked me three years ago, “How many workers do you have in this country?” I replied, “None.” “None!?” he repeated. “None? How can you have no workers in a country of tens of millions of people?” This man and his wife persuaded another couple from their home group to join them, and these four were commissioned by their church. Today they live and work among Muslims.



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adults back home. That was a massive amateurization of mission. It is happening again.”⁴

Examples of Genuine Success

Yet when churches and agencies work together

One Church Seeking Strategic Coaching

One church coached by Frontiers has stated its mission values in this way.

1. Strategic: "Going where the church is not"

Since the King will only return once His "Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached in the whole world as a witness to all the ethne" (Mt 24:14), we will only go to the most unreached of the Unreached World, ... so help us God!

2. Effective: "Church Planting Movements"

Since nothing shy of numerous movements (CPMs) will suffice to bring in that day when "all the earth will be filled . . . with an awareness of the glory of the Lord" (Hab 2:14), we will adopt, develop and implement strategies believed to effectively launch CPMs. Conversely, we will not allow ourselves to be drawn into strategies or ministries unlikely to facilitate a CPM ... so help us God!

3. Active: "Church-Based Teams"

Since the King desires that His children will "be one. . . so that the world may believe the Father sent the Son" (Jn 17:21), and since a large percentage of teams dissolve adversarially before ever launching CPMs, we will send teams comprised of a "community" from the same church, who share common values, ethos and "sympathy" to stay until a CPM is launched amongst their targeted people ... so help us God!

4. Long-Term: "10 years to life"

Since today's "drive-by" evangelism finds it easy to "lose heart in doing good" and since the King promised that "in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal 6:9), both planters and senders will make commitments of 10 years to life to see a CPM launched ... so help us God!

5. Humble: "Under effective coaching, usually by an agency"

Since "plans go wrong for lack of advice" and "many counselors bring success" (Pr 15:22), churches will not attempt to launch CPMs on their own, but will partner with coaches who will keep us going ... so help us God!

• **Hope of the Valley, Arizona.** In 1988 the pastor of this church spent a month on the USCWM campus in Pasadena, taking the *Perspectives* course in the mornings and using the afternoons to do research on sending a church team. In 1990 the majority of the church's elders and their wives visited a Turkic country. In 1991 the church elders and congregation decided to send a team committed to serve at least ten years in this country, with the goal of "planting a cluster of reproducing churches among Muslims." In the past eight years the team of four families has weathered a flurry of setbacks, but today a Turkic believer leads the outreach. Meanwhile, Hope of the Valley offers a 24-hour retreat for local church leaders who want to take a giant step towards sending their own effective church teams.⁷

If local churches approach the task of pioneer church planting with humility, they will have the joy of which there is no greater in all the world: they will have sons and daughters at the ends of the earth that will rise up on the last day and call them blessed. 🌐

¹ According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Children's Crusade was "a religious movement in Europe during the summer of 1212 in which thousands of children set out to conquer the Holy Land from the Muslims by love instead of by force. The movement ended in disaster."

² Donald A. McGavran, "A Church for Every People: Plain Talk about a Difficult Subject", p. 619 of *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd edition. To receive a free copy of David Garrison's book, *Church Planting Movements*, write to resource.center@imb.org.

³ Ralph D. Winter, "Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission", p. 221 of *Perspectives*

⁴ Ralph D. Winter, "The Re-Amateurization of Missions" *Mission Frontiers*, March-April 1996

⁵ The names of the churches have been changed.

⁶ Write to Rodger.manning@gracetogo.org to receive the ten-page case study describing this church's experience in sending a long-term pioneer church-planting team to a Muslim country.

⁷ Write to Rodger.manning@gracetogo.org and ask for the 24-hour retreat brochure. When you write, ask for the chart that Frontiers has developed, "Seven Phases of Preparing to Send a Church Team."

