

In this article we shall think about the strategies for church planting and I will propose some strategies that can be applied in diverse contexts (urban, rural and tribal) in a relevant way.

### Strategy 1 - Research and understanding of the local society

To try to reach people, evangelize them and group them into Christian communities, without understanding them, is to demonstrate arrogance and lack of wisdom. It is necessary to understand the local population before we approach it with the Gospel.

In his book *They like Jesus, But Not the Church* Dan Kimball identifies a young generation, globalized, post-modern and post-church in North America that admires Jesus but is repelled by the Church. Such identification was crucial for the process of church planting that spread over various parts of America: a preaching that started from the church as people and not the church as an institution. Their evangelistic programs were always outside the church building. The proclamation of Christ concentrated on His purity and truth. During the discipling, however, biblical concepts of the Church were introduced: its nature and limitations.

Without research and understanding of the local society Kimball certainly would not have reached thousands and thousands of young people that would normally never enter a church building and who had a clear resistance to a message presented by the Church. But they were open to Jesus.

In research to understand the society to whom we go and with which we are working, some questions must be answered - how many are they, where are they, what are their means of subsistence, from where have they come, how are they organized, how do they relate to one another, which religion predominates, which other minority religions have most influence, how is their society organized in affinity and family groups.

In his article 'The Implanting of Healthy Churches—the best strategy' Rubens Muzio (OC Ministry) proposes some steps for a research survey of the socio-cultural and historical context of a city:

- a) Collect the available and previously compiled statistics that point out the different religious, historical, social and cultural realities of the city and neighborhood.
- b) Get hold of a strategic map of urban missions that contains the socio-economic, geo-political and urban divisions of the city or region.
- c) Answer some questions about each neighborhood or region of the city, by visiting the religious centers, citizen associations, social projects, hospitals and other places of importance.
- d) Apply a quantitative research of the churches, noting their localities in the city so as to know where they are located and areas not reached by the churches.

I believe a demographic survey is fundamental for the process of planting churches. Here are some suggestions:

Record the numbers and distribution of social diversity in a target area for church planting

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If city 'A' has a population of 50,000, and is near city 'B' of only 10,000, a church planter will observe the rule of larger centers of population. We must begin in the centers with the larger population with the aim of reaching a larger number of people that are able to influence many others in the smaller centers.

However it is necessary to survey and know the populations of these two cities of 50,000 and 10,000 before we focus our attention on a definite place because there are many variables. Perhaps the smaller city with 10,000 may be highly homogeneous in its social classes, language, cultural background and life style. On the other hand we shall suppose, for the purpose of our study that the city of 50,000 has 8 different strong diverse groups. Some are ethnic groups (by cultural origins), others are social (economic and social classes), others are linked to their life style, as a consequence of the others.

In this way, while a strongly planted and nourished church could be sufficient to reach the homogeneous population of the city with 10,000, we would need to plant tens of churches in order to reach the diversified population of 50,000. This consideration based on the demographic survey is relevant to the church planter.

A demographic study should not concentrate on the map but on the human distribution. A map will show you the roads, neighborhoods and commercial centers. Walking around these places it can be noted the relevant human nuances. It can be seen that in spite of it being possible to plant one church to embrace diverse and distinct social and cultural sectors, there is little possibility that this may happen, given our tendency, anthropologically, to associate with those that are similar to us. Multicultural churches are increasing as a worldwide missiological method, but in missionary practice, their implementation and continuity is complex.

So, observe and register which are the cultural, social and economic sectors in your area or target location for church planting. Estimate the population of each of these sectors. Identify the one that might be your principal target, with the greatest potential to influence others.

Observe whether the population with which you will work is urban, suburban, rural or tribal

Urban populations are normally more cautious toward those that do not belong to them. They form groupings emphasizing privacy, work and selective events. The symbols of status are of extreme relevance and identify the social and economic classes in a linear hierarchy. The urban tribes formed by young people between 15-25 years follow their own inclinations and create closed groups by affinity. The point of affinity may be the dress style, or a rebellious attitude or an interest in the same style of music. Church planters should note that their penetration in such groups only happens through a relationship with one or more of its members. Evangelistic efforts must be directed and specific not general, given the distinct profile between the various sectors. An entrance point, such as a family or a member of a social group should be used so that the Gospel can be presented in an atmosphere of great trust and acceptance.

Suburban populations are normally structured on the family and are more open to relations with those from outside. The level of privacy is less and they tend to interrelate more informally

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in the squares, streets and stores. They are open to the presence of churches that involve themselves with the community in trying to meet their social needs. The church planter must live among them and become one of them. He must involve himself with their social and community programs. The evangelistic effort can be more general, to the whole group, from a central place that creates a calm atmosphere.

Rural populations normally demonstrate greater friendliness towards outsiders, however with less trust. Hospitality is valued as precious and to be applied, this brings the outsider among them, but they still maintain distrust and a distance within themselves. They are traditional and hold to their community and religious values, which will create evident barriers to evangelization. The evangelistic effort must occur starting with key families that form part of the community tradition. It is necessary to establish oneself among them and be part of rural events.

Tribal populations are exclusive placing greater restrictions in regard to those from outside. Normally, they have ethnic barriers such as distinct languages and cultures and so the criterion to enter and be accepted by others in the local society is much slower and complex. This process involves personal adaptation, community involvement, linguistic fluency and cultural adaptation. They are traditionalists and will identify any evangelistic religious endeavor as being alien to their environment and worldview. The evangelistic effort must be based on entry into the group, the learning of the language, the culture and the understanding of the worldview, its values and vital elements in relation to the understanding of sin, pardon and salvation.

Therefore, demographic research can be seen as a first strategy in the process of evangelizing a community and planting a church among them.

Develop a method of research, whether by a directional questionnaire, sample interviews or by active observation. Your aim is to measure the group with which you work, understand it socially and culturally, identify its distinct divisions and start evangelism with an approach that might be receptive, functional and clear.

### Strategy 2 - Abundant Evangelism

Churches are not planted in pastors' studies or missiological research centers. They are planted in the streets. In this context the quantity and constancy of evangelism becomes a fundamental action in church planting. On the mission field, either in culturally different or in geographically near situations, the amount of evangelism must be a constant practice. Some fields are not fruitful because they invest more time in missionary or ecclesiastical structuring and less on evangelism, and this is a danger for both our local churches as well as our more distant missionary fields.

While doing mission consultant work in different countries I studied the processes of church planting that were in progress. For this I observed the mission fields in terms of two categories: the level of organization, and the level of evangelization.

The level of organization: Noting the presence of well established missionary posts, good mobility with their own transport, and a working system of communication between the

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missionary teams and cultural and linguistic supervision.

The level of evangelization: Noting the presence of personal evangelistic initiatives, multiple attempts of communicating the Gospel to the community with the use of literature and films, etc.

The conclusions were as expected. The greatest number of churches was born and the greatest maturity was found in the fields with greater evangelism, even when it was to the detriment of mission organizational aspects. Only on the fields with constant evangelism was there visible fruit and we see here an interesting value. In spite of us having a clear recognition that only evangelism leads people to Christ, we can entangle ourselves in various and many daily activities in the desire to plant a church but lose the principle focus: to present Christ.

In this process of church planting it is necessary to have a balance between training and character. I know of some PhDs in Missiology who work as missionaries around the world who, I have the impression, have not had a real personal experience of the new birth. On the other hand I know missionaries filled by God and passionate for Jesus who did not have the opportunity to receive training that might have maximized their ability, and pay a high price because of this.

After three years among the Konkombas, when the Church grew rapidly and the Gospel reached very remote places, I asked the local leaders about the principal reason as to why we were accepted among them: a) ability to speak the local dialect and be understood easily; b) understanding of the culture, customs and way of life of the Konkomba; c) personal involvement with the tribal society?

They then replied: 'What made our people stop to hear you is because you always smiled when you saw us and stopped to greet us.' In this relational society the informal interaction with the group was, therefore, the linking factor and trust that created the right environment to stop and listen to us. This must be a question to be answered in our action area. In our situation, what attitude, approach or activity enables the people to stop to listen? Which are the environments in which I am able to listen, learn and also speak?

If we desire to plant churches, the large structure for missionary subsistence, such as transport, mobility, communication, dwelling and training will be a great contribution to the final process. However the determining factor will be the presence of constant evangelism.

David Brainerd (1718-1747) in the evangelization of the Indians of North America, states, that much to his surprise, the greatest evangelistic result in his meetings with least ideal organization, was when an alcoholic Indian took the place of his translator, who had become sick. The Indian had little fluency in English and could hardly sit down without falling down yet people responded to the message. Brainerd wrote in his diary after this event that the message goes beyond the messenger. What a church planter does is not so important, except to give priority to much evangelism.

Strategy 3 - Communication of a Christ-centered Gospel

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Constant evangelism, on the other hand, is only a strategic functional element if the content of the evangelism is the Word of God.

Here we need to remember that one of the greatest errors in church planting is to treat the Gospel as a project. The Gospel is not a project. It is Christ. And therefore, it is the Word of God, news of the Person of Christ, His life and mission that converts hearts. In spite of believing that it is necessary for a church planter to be disciplined and organized we cannot fall into the error to treat the Gospel and its proclamation in a managerial and logistic manner.

Frequently I see evangelistic initiatives that have an excellent human approach, clear communication, and relevant social appeal. However they sin where we must not err: in the absence of the Word of God in the evangelistic act. We need to revise the content of our evangelistic efforts, because we have moved away from the centrality of Christ to the exposition of the church. I see many evangelistic initiatives that promote the church, its environment of security, morality and fellowship, and especially its service to others. But they do not present Christ. We run the risk of packing our churches with people linked to a service that values the family and encourages moral living and nothing else.

There are many mass movement strategies that 'function' but are not biblical. David Hesselgrave warns us by saying that 'not every new idea is led by the Spirit. Not everything that is new is necessarily good. The Bible is ancient, the Gospel is ancient and the Great Commission is ancient..' Truly he states that in the immense sea of needs in the unreached world, we need to understand that 'the Gospel gives direction... because the Word precedes our vision.'

We must remind ourselves of what is central to New Testament missiology. The central point of New Testament Missiology is evangelism and evangelism is the act of proclaiming the Gospel. Let us therefore exam and understand better this Gospel, seeing it as the content of our evangelism.

We turn back 2,000 years of history, and specifically to the region of Palestine, to the places where Christ went. Imagine a strong man, dressed in camel skins, worn sandals, dirty beard, long hair, carrying only a little honey in his bag. His name was John the Baptist and he preached to the people. His sermons were hard; he spoke of the 'consuming fire' and the 'axe laid at the root of the trees' and the 'straw burning in inextinguishable fire' and during his appeals he used strong words such as 'race of vipers'.

Suddenly there appeared before the people another Man, dressed simply, surrounded by a group of men who were also humble, and He spoke with an attractive voice. He was Jesus. He, in contrast to John, came speaking of 'good news' (Gospel) and 'good news of the Kingdom'. His message is strange. He came speaking about a different way of living, an evangelical way, molded by the Gospel. A life in which the husband does not dominate his wife, but loves her. In which the persecuted does not hate the one who persecutes him, but prays for him. In which the Christian leader does not exercise power over his flock, but serves it. In which the community of saints does not organize revolution against evil authorities, but intercedes for

them. In which the least is the greatest, to die is gain, and only those who recognize their weakness become strong. In which one goes the second mile for the one who demands you to go one mile. In which you turn the other cheek to be struck when someone strikes you. There is no attachment to this world, because all His disciples are pilgrims and their native land is unknown. The guarantee to have this is a promise and one only reaches life by first dying. This is the Gospel, a given collection of values to a people known as those 'of the Way.'

The Gospel in the first centuries was a deposit of values from God which claimed a transformed way of life. It was practical, visible, existential and contagious.

Rich men stopped robbing and returned the stolen money four times more than what was extorted from others. Adulterous women abandoned their life of promiscuity and transformed themselves into witnesses. Fishermen left their nets to follow the carpenter of Nazareth. Many sold everything they had to distribute it among those that had nothing. Thousands died, were crucified or burnt to death for refusing to deny their Lord, whom they had never seen face to face. This was the Gospel being preached and lived.

I wish, therefore, we might understand that the Gospel in this way was not merely good news, but good news that demanded a transformed life style, according to God's values.

There are two truths that we need to understand about the Gospel: its origin and its content. In the New Testament we are confronted many times with the presentation of the Gospel as the 'Gospel of God', pointing to the origin of the Gospel, that is, it is not a human invention but a divine revelation. In 1 Cor. 9:18, when Paul expresses 'that when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ' (NKJV) we understand from the start that the content of evangelism is the Gospel. Further on, in chapter 15 of the same letter, Paul tells the Church about the 'gospel which I preached to you' (v1) and in verses 3-4 he begins to relate this Gospel saying:

' . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,  
and that He was buried,  
and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, . . .'

therefore, Jesus Christ is the very Gospel. In this way we begin to understand that the content of evangelism is the Gospel and the content of the Gospel is Jesus Christ.

Therefore we are able to affirm that there is no true and biblical evangelism without the presentation of the Lord Jesus. Captivating stories, gripping testimonies, social activities, miracles, signs and good will are not substitutes for the central element of evangelism: The Lord Jesus. There is no evangelism without the cross of Christ. There is no salvation without His blood. There is no salvation by any other name. There is no story greater than His story.

The Gospel should also be presented in the context of the creation, human fallen, the promised Messiah, His life, death and resurrection, the eternal life in Jesus and the cosmological plan of God for all humanity.

Also we must be cautious not to confuse the presentation of Christian ethics with the presentation of Jesus Christ. I have heard evangelists who in their eagerness to get near to the people and transmit a message that is acceptable to them recommend the benefits of Christian ethics, of Christian behaviour, and the historic values of Christianity. It is necessary to present Christ, expound His life as the fulfilment of the Promise of the Father. His miraculous birth that brought hope into human history. His character and His life. His death and resurrection. His redeeming blood. His unconditional love. His character of Servant and power as King. What He did in my life. How He transformed me. How He did it in the lives of many, many people. What He can do for you too. It is necessary to believe in the message, understand its values and to follow Him. Evangelism without Christ is nothing more than an interesting presentation which may convince some of the value of Christianity but never lead us to the salvation of God, for the salvation of God is Christ.

### Strategy 4 - Prayer

Patrick Johnstone, one of the greatest missiologists of our day states that when man works, man works. When man prays, God works. Missiologists and researchers such as David Garrison, David Barrett and many others have mentioned the clear link between prayer and church planting. Ethnic groups, neighborhoods, streets and cities that have been the target of prayer are precisely the peoples and places where the Gospel has rooted itself with more depth. This must never be a surprise to us because we believe that God answers prayer.

The Lord Jesus teaches us that prayer, united with faith prompts a reply from the Father (Mat. 21:22). Also we remember that when facing the most difficult barriers to the Kingdom of God we must prepare ourselves with prayer and fasting (Mat. 17:21). The Master also linked prayer to daily life with God, the need of every human being (Lk. 6:12), and He was sad because His disciples slept when they needed to watch (Lk. 22:45). After His death we see these same disciples united in prayer (Acts 1:14). Peter and John went out together to pray (Acts 3:1) and the apostles gave their attention to teaching the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4) and the building up of the Church. Paul tells us that he prays for the planted churches (Eph. 6:18) and Peter exhorts us to watch and pray (1 Peter 4:7). Prayer permeates the Kingdom on earth. There is a clear link between prayer and God's answers.

I believe that there are possibly in the world today more than 200 great church planting movements underway. In all of them their leaders testify to the presence of deliberate prayer, both voluntary and abundant. That is prayer as much by the team that evangelizes and plants churches as well as by the people that receive the Gospel. If we desire to plant churches we need to pray.

The Yanomami tribes (5 groups) in Brazil and Venezuela heard the Gospel since the 1950's. However for 5 decades they were not coming to the Lord. The missionaries who worked among them sharing the gospel did it in a very faithful way, from the beginning. Several missionary organizations, such UFM, SIL, MNT, MAF worked for decades among them with almost no results at all.

About 10 years ago the church in Brazil, Venezuela and in many other countries around the World began to pray more and more for the Yanomami tribes. We see now a miracle

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happening. They are coming to the Lord in number! And from everywhere. Villages far from each other, without any contact are experiencing the impact of the Gospel at the same time. They are coming to Jesus, making songs of praise to Him and are all thirsty for the Word of God. In the indigenous meetings we have had in these last 2 years a number of Yanomami are coming. They want to speak to all about their conversion, sing their songs, and tell their stories.

I have no doubt that what we see among the Yanomami is a direct result of prayer.

Rossana and I have experienced blessed moments in church planting among the Konkombas. A fact that we keep with gratitude in our hearts is the conviction that the birth of these churches was the answer of God to the prayers of His people. My mother, Euza Lidório, voluntarily coordinates a ministry which began some time ago when we went to Africa. These people are watchmen in prayer. She produces monthly calendars with prayer requests of missionaries from around the world, and distributes them free to brethren who want to form groups to pray for these requests each week or each day. Today this ministry has 700 groups scattered over the whole of Brazil; two of them in prisons where believers meet together to intercede for missionary work. We are convinced that the conversion of the Konkomba in the area we lived followed the movement of prayer. God answers prayer.

Mobilize people to pray for your church planting ministry. Be the first to intercede daily before the Father for the people. Name them. Believe that God will answer prayer.

Strategy 5 - Organization of local churches

The joining together of converts in a local community for fellowship, study of the Word, prayer and mutual encouragement was the Pauline strategy. The election of elders and local leaders, freed the apostle for planting other churches and contributed to the maturing of the local community (Acts 14:21-23). The apostle Paul, therefore, did not spend all his time and energy in evangelism but concentrated also on the conclusion of this process that involved discipleship and organization of local churches.

We must notice the clear difference, therefore, between evangelism and church planting. While evangelism carries out the communication of the Gospel to an individual or group, aiming to lead them to the knowledge of Christ, church planting desires to carry out discipleship training, the joining together of the saints, the teaching of the Word, development of local leadership, and meetings for fellowship, worship and prayer as well as the rooting of a missionary zeal.

Michael Green calls our attention to the dynamic of the New Testament Church. Communion between the brethren (Acts 2:44-47) which was the characteristic of the people of God. When the historian relates that 'all of those who believed were together' he makes us reflect on the nature of the church. The joining together of the saints is not simply a strategy of church planting but a fundamental need that we have as followers of Christ, to share with the brethren our faith, our praise, witness, encouragement, prayer and study of the Word.

In the organization of local churches we need to note some biblical models:

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1. Evangelism and discipleship are two elements that need to work together in balance. If we emphasize the first to the detriment of the second we would have churches full of people interested in the Word, but with few really converted and mature in Christ. With the opposite emphasis we would have a small group of believers, mature and firm in the faith, but living in a static congregation without the addition of new people to the Christian faith.
2. Discipleship training is the best process to identify the future local leadership. A church planter must identify among his disciples those that are leaders. In these he must invest effort so as to train them for leadership; beyond the study of the Word this allows them to accompany him on visits, in evangelism and in the solution of conflicts.
3. Gathering for the public service of worship is an act that must be central in the organization of the local churches. We meet together for God and by God and public worship reminds us of this.
4. The election or appointment of local leaders is an important step and must be carried out while making sure it is of believers that are faithful to God, with knowledge of the Word and who have already had their faith tested.
5. The Lord's Supper and Baptism promote fellowship and commitment.
6. The exposition of the Word can be from a pulpit in a formal manner or teaching in houses in an informal way, but it must be central in the life of the Church. The Church's maturity will depend on the knowledge, love and commitment that it has to the Word of God.
7. The missionary responsibility must not wait. Already in the discipleship training and the first meetings of the church the church must be led to reproduce what it has learnt of the Lord to others, whether nearby or distant. Remember that the church, even at its beginnings, will only learn if you lead it in evangelism, taking the new converts with you to reach others.

We must remember that every large church planting movement that becomes permanent in a region counts on the strong involvement of local people right from the beginning. The investment in local people, passing to them the vision, passion and strategies will guarantee a process of church planting that goes on beyond that of the missionary or evangelist. It will go on beyond its own generation too. We must not measure how solid a project of church planting is by the number of people involved or the structure constructed for it. We should measure it by the quantity and quality of local people that are being discipled and prepared for leadership.

The reproduction of planted churches in a second phase idealistically must be done by means of the fruit and not from the root of the movement. In this stage the missionaries must be in a position of supervision of the vision and of encouragement, and not in the front line. Churches should plant churches. The missionary model that I suggest is: begin, disciple, reproduce, assist, encourage, leave and supervise.

So as for us, to build churches with missionary 'DNA' it is necessary to invest in teaching the Word and in experience of evangelism. Missionary appeals, statistics or stories do not develop

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missionary 'DNA' in a local church. It is necessary to merge two transforming elements: The teaching of the Word and experience of evangelism. It is necessary to preach the biblical evangelism mandate. To expound with clarity what is our mission. Demonstrate our responsibility towards the world, with biblical evidence. It is necessary also to lead the church to experience mission. Take them to the streets, the street corners, the squares and apartment blocks where they can speak openly of Jesus, share their faith, and evangelize the lost. The teaching of the Word and the experience of evangelism linked together are the two constructive elements to develop a missionary 'DNA' in a local church.

### Strategy 6 - Discipling and training local leaders

The believers of the New Testament were not only rapidly incorporated into the church, but were also disciplined and trained as local leaders. The multiplication of the local leadership is proportional to the multiplication of the churches. A local church, judged from the point of view of its growth, must be analyzed by the number and quality of leaders in training and not the quantity of members.

Michael Green states that the discipleship training in the Primitive Church was directed to prepare men and women so that they might evangelize and plant new Christian communities.

Among the Konkombas in Ghana we identified among the new converts those who desired to learn more and with greater consistency. With these six persons we spent more time for about three years. We invited them to accompany me on each visit or journey. They were present in the public evangelism. They went with me on visits to the sick and needy as well as those for the resolution of conflicts. This first little group today leads all of the 23 churches. They are five pastors and Makanda, one of the elders of greatest influence in the Church among the Konkombas.

As you evangelize you identify those that desire to learn more. These are those that have a teachable heart, a thirst for the Word and a disposition to be at your side. With these people work in a systematic way for at least two years. Study the Word with them each week. Visit them at work and at home. Develop their friendship so that they have opportunity to open their hearts. Link them to some of your ministerial activities such as visitation and public evangelism. Put them into the daily life of the church, give them responsibilities. Keep close to them and also give them challenges: to give their testimony in public, to cooperate with some ministry of the church, to expound a biblical text in a small group. Look out for when they are ready to take on greater responsibilities. Release them so that they are able to get on without you and encourage them to disciple others.

### Strategy 7 - Social involvement that promotes social action

Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10) relates how a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan face a man fallen at the wayside, and speaks to us of false religiosity and true Christianity. The priest, knowledgeable in the Word, and the Levite, a minister of worship to God, made up the religious clergy of the time. Their reluctance to stop beside the fallen man reveals much more than insensitivity. It reveals that it is possible to be a church knowledgeable

of the Bible, be involved with God's worship and at the same time despise desperate human need.

Also in this way we can plant churches that speak of Christ, and love the Word of God and at the same time despise the desperate situation of those around us. It is possible to be a gathering of the saints in the midst of human misery without ever noticing the need and this can happen every day.

In the demographic study it is necessary to observe the community where you live and preach the Word. What are their anxieties and real needs? What are the elements of poverty or social need? What is necessary to be done? What are the human causes so that we can be involved with them? Where are the fallen at the wayside?

It is certain that Calvin advocated a school for each church in reformed Geneva. However his social influence went well beyond education. Harkness mentions that Calvin desired to transform Geneva in the Civit Dei – the City of God. Alexandre Ganoczy complements this by saying that this 'City of God' consisted in fact of seeing the Word preached as influencing every aspect of society: moral, ethical, behavioural, educational and social. Calvin did not plan simply to plant a church in Geneva. He planned to influence Geneva to the point that she reflected the values of Christ.

As we look at an area, neighborhood, city or social segment or ethnic group, we must ask how we might be able to communicate Christ and the Word in such a way that the values of the Kingdom produce both salvation and transformation.

Planted churches that through the years do not produce human and social transformation are spiritual fortresses that even in their search for the values of the Kingdom cease to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Some steps for this are as follows:

1. Ask the Lord to make our heart sensitive, so that you are led to recognize and observe the human and social needs. Look for where there is human suffering.
2. Preach in an uncompromising way about sin and its consequences, as human injustice, believing that Christ will save the soul and give a sense of righteousness to the body.
3. Develop a line of action starting from the profile of your church. If there is a group of doctors and nurses present encourage them to form mobile clinics. If there are mothers and women present, start a crèche to help a needy community. If there is a body of psychologists, develop a program to help with emotional illnesses.
4. Begin a small experimental project and involve yourself personally in it.
5. Involve the church with society. Allow them to feel the human suffering and to begin to care about it. Lead them to be involved in the local society.
6. Expound from the Word, the difference Christ can make in a society, transforming the suffering into hope.
7. Do not let the misery and injustice make your vision become a negative reaction, because a negative spirit does not have the equilibrium for the battle. Have in your mind that the Word is your best instrument and the greatest good that you can give to society. Only the Gospel will produce a lasting and permanent transformation.

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There are many more strategies that should be observed in the process of planting a church. I consider these 7 the main ones that will lead us to achieve our mission: to be among the people, being accepted by them, to share the gospel that changes the entire life, heart and body; pray to God and bring people close to us, to walk together, making disciples and trusting that they will understand Jesus and, share Him with others.

Whatever you do, when you think about church planting, don't picture a building or a paper project, but a number of people together looking at Jesus.

### Strategy 8 - Development of a church planter profile

This is without doubt one of the most complex subjects when we struggle with CP projects. There is a vast amount written on the subject, forums and consultations which attempt to standardize the profile of men and women that plant churches, analyzing the strong points, their personal and ministerial characteristics and their limitations.

I believe that certainly there is a general profile that must be observed and we shall quote some of these necessary characteristics or attitudes. However, after some years of observation I have conclude that CP is not necessarily associated with temperament or charisma, but linked to convictions and personal posture. I have seen many men and women with all the imaginable human characteristics for a good church planter, such as evangelistic initiative, personal charisma, outgoing personality, informality and dynamism, yet they stopped on the way after trying without success to complete a local project. On the other hand I see men and women with human characteristics that, at the first sight, are not who you would expect to succeed in a CP project. Perhaps a very introverted person, lacking of personal charisma, with difficulty to communicate or to relate easily in society, with little dynamism and so on, but who planted churches that seemed to spread up naturally.

Hesselgrave in his book *Planting Churches* deals with the profile of the church planter emphasizing his integrity before God, the mission and the people. He places in the background the methodology and puts first the integrity of the heart of the one who hears the call of God and desires to obey. The fact is that a church planter is not able to be identified only by external characteristics but by the attitude of the heart. Perhaps it is unnecessary to mention many men and women, prepared for CP, having the resources, the capacity, a strong sending church and the support of a missionary organization, but who do not go far because of lack of integrity, with God, the team or the local people.

Therefore we are able to reflect at this point, that the convictions and call of the church planter is much more fundamental for such a ministry than his human profile. His attitude and disposition will make a greater difference in the process of planting churches than his abilities and skills.

When I look for a church planter who joins us, or in some project with which we are associated, I have in mind five characteristics that must not be lacking:

A strong conviction of call – a certainty that he is there because the Lord wants him and has

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called him to serve.

Integrity – in relation to the Lord's call, the colleagues with whom he will work and to people with whom he will live.

A teachable spirit – a disposition and humility to hear, think over, learn and make sincere choices and also to teach.

Evangelistic ardour – The desire to make Jesus known, and with the initiative to do this.  
The fear of the Lord – he relates to God as a servant ready to serve.

Some of the most common errors in church planters:

1. Treat the planting of a church in a purely managerial way. CP is a spiritual activity that requires a life with God and the Word of God. The managerial method compromises the spirituality and focuses on the activities of human groups. The result, common in various situations, is a church that is large but shallow. A generation of movements with great social mobilization, but little commitment to God.
2. To plant a 'a church of your dreams' or a church for yourself, where you fit in and are satisfied for years as a place that gives you ministerial security. This attitude compromises your ministry by submitting it to a purely personal dream. This contradicts your future life and creates frustration if God sends you elsewhere. Plant churches for God and His glory. Do not think of yourself as the church's guardian. Concentrate on the ministry and call of the Lord and keep in mind that He can lead outside your comfort zone.
3. Plant churches starting from other churches. To plant churches from divisions or attracting people from other flocks will create a church with the tendency to divide in the future. Also it will weaken and de-motivate other churches and impede the tranquil communion between communities and ministries. A church planter must start in the streets, or forest, houses or huts, public places, radio and TV stations, universities and primary schools, in the luxury apartment blocks and in the poorest area of the town, that is, wherever there are people who have not given themselves to Jesus.

Among the various characteristics of a church planter I would like to think a little about two essential things: a visionary and someone identified with the people.

The vision determines our attitudes and initiative. To begin the CP project without a defined vision is like starting a journey without a route and a destination. The lack of a definite vision not only undermines the work of the church planter but impedes creating cooperation from others for his vision.

A definite vision will eventually suggest goals, plans, strategies and approaches, but to maintain the vision is the fundamental element without which no ministry will be able to sustain itself for very long. So we must seek and follow God's vision. We know well that not every vision of a man of God is necessarily the vision of God. Therefore, it is important to seek and

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follow God's vision. And when the Lord transmits it to our hearts we are led to incarnate it, live it, and influence others for such a vision.

Maybe your vision is to see local leaders trained in the Bible. Or to see the gospel reaching a certain tribe. Maybe your vision is to see an orphanage helping those who are without hope. I believe we don't give ourselves entirely to a work, project or challenge if we don't have a strong and clear vision in our minds and hearts. What is your vision in your present ministry ?

The identification with the people is not merely a consequence of sociological empathy starting from an understanding of a human segment with which you work, but it is a passion involving the heart and soul. I do not believe in church planters that do not have a personal involvement with their goal people; who do not live among them; who do not feel their joys and sorrows, who do not anguish to perceive the effect of sin in their lives. Who do not know their dreams and do not dream the same dreams.

The identification with the people is a process produced from living with the people. That is, because we were not born there, we do not have the natural manners or feelings, impressions and behavioral values of the people with whom we work, it is necessary to live together with them so as to gain this identification.

It is necessary also to think about the church planter from the biblical-theological viewpoint of the ministerial call. In Ephesians 4:11 the apostle Paul teaches us that the Lord called in His church men for defined ministerial roles for the building up of the Body, using here five categories: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is important for us to draw some textual conclusions at this point.

First, we understand that all the saints form part of the Body, the Church of Christ, however some were called to exercise a specific function in the edification of this Church. Second, we recognize that the ministerial call is functional, that is, we need to know our call in order to better serve the Lord. Also we are to understand that, in this way; many are able to be involved serving God, working in the ministry in something distinct in their call.

When we use the ecclesiastical title, such as pastor, evangelist, reverend or bishop we are recognizing the tradition in relation to the ministerial position, used by a denomination. Not every 'pastor' has a pastoral call. Many are in fact teachers, for example. Not every 'evangelist' is really an evangelist. Many are pastors. And so on.

I believe that we identify our ministerial call in a functional way according to Ephesians 4 because it is foundational for us to serve God. Do not worry yourself too much about where you go, because the geographical direction that God gives us can change often. Be occupied in recognizing who you are in the ministry, whether an apostle, pastor, evangelist, prophet or teacher.

The apostle, from the verb *apostelo* indicates one who is sent. It refers historically to those that were sent out by Christ for the expansion of His church. John Knox understood that the apostle was a little stone thrown far away, those that are sent to where the message had not

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arrived, where the Church was not present. John Maxwell refers to these as way-openers and in the Christian tradition the apostles were used by God to invade with the Gospel the most remote places. We are able to understand an apostle, in the sense of a functional call, as being someone attracted to the lost. His desire is to announce Christ and he does it with joy in his heart. When he arrives at a field he casts the Gospel everywhere. When the church is born his heart already starts to be awakened to have an interest in other more distant places, drawn by the masses of the unreached, always thinking of new places to go, to a new field in which to sow.

The prophet, or profetes in the original text, referred to one who spoke from God. The prophet did not have an obligation rooted in the church but with the message of God. His pleasure is to announce it and when he did so he understood that he had completed his mission. He is not conformed to the world or with the Church. He does not need titles or platforms to present the message. He does it to a group of five persons or with the same fearlessness to 5,000. His message is non-conformed, transforming and questioning. He speaks to the people of God and speaks also to the people without God.

The evangelist, or euaggelistes, is not what we understand to be an evangelist. The euaggelistes in the NT was more one who disciplined. He spoke of Christ but his main desire was to lead men and women to be transformed 'to the model of the Gospel'. The evangelist realized a silent, personal and passionate work. He completed it when the new converts became mature Christians. When they began to love Christ and even to die for Him. He loved to work one to one. To get alongside a person interested in the Gospel, or a recent convert, to follow him and to disciple him. He is involved with the group, but even more involved with individuals.

The pastor, poimenos, is a carer of the flock. His pleasure is to conduct the flock to the Lord Jesus. He knows personally the community he pastors, is involved with it, and rooted to where it is. His joy is to know how each member of the church is, what their pains are, visit them at home, greets them at the door of the church. The pastor, poimenos, is personal, pastoral, caring and involved in the group.

The teacher, or didaskalos, loves the Word. His pleasure is to expound the Bible in a clear manner. When it is understood and applied he has done his work. He is not involved so much with a group, being able to travel between various groups, seeing that the transmission of the Word is his greatest love. He dedicates himself to its study and to understanding it. Each new lesson is an act of the love of God for him and from him to the people that listen.

Certainly there are brethren who have a ministerial call for more than one of these functions in the Body. As Paul we can be apostles-prophets-teachers, however I like to believe that the majority of us have a priority or principal calling that fills our hearts. This is that which we do with total motivation and also with greater ability. The recognition of the Church also proves it.

To send a poimenos or pastor to plant a church where the Word has not yet known and there are no converts is foolhardy. In the same way it is foolish to indicate an apostolos, a church planter, to pastor a flock. We need to know who we are in relation to our ministerial calling and

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to keep that particular focus.

Church planters are persons called by God to expound the Gospel where it has not yet arrived and has not born fruit. It would be ideal to think that in one project of CP there could be a team with brethren with all these five different functions. In practical terms I think that many ministries are poorly led in respect to the workers' callings; at times for lack of ideal opportunities, or at times for lack of orientation. I have seen brethren with a clear ministerial call, working in an area remote from their ministerial profile, and paying a high price in discouragement and unhappiness. If advice could be given it would be this: Fulfil your ministry to which God has called you. Do not be content with anything less than this. Do not compromise your call to fit in with interesting invitations or tempting propositions. Nor compromise it by the desire of the heart to enter into a comfort zone. Remember your responsibility is to God.

To Bible seminary and missionary students I have suggested that they test themselves in the work of the local church or on the street, the apartment blocks, or suburbs. Young people that dream about planting churches must go to where the Church is not! Travel the streets, converse with unbelievers, expose yourself to a project (or cooperation with one) and aim to plant a church where the Word has not germinated. In six months you will be able to know whether this is really the call of God. See if this is the calling that fills your heart. I know brethren blessed by God, with a clear ministerial calling, with gifts and talents, but who became discouraged from the ministry because they kept on doing the thing for which someone else was called to do. Answer this question: In the light of Ephesians to what are you called?

Know who you are, which your calling is, go and cooperate with the advance of the Kingdom and have the joy of your heart.