Can Church Planting Movements Emerge in the West? Case Studies of Three Church Planting Strategies in Western Australia

Introduction to Church Planting Movements

Over the past twenty years church organizations in the global West have looked on with awe, tinged with envy, at the rapid growth of church planting movements (CPMs) in the developing world. These CPMs have emerged while the West has been preoccupied with the growing tide of post modernism and secularism in their once Christian nations. These movements have been observed to be emerging on every continent with developing nations, from South America to Asia, Africa, and Europe, and often under significant persecution.

For a movement to be defined as such, David Garrison suggests that it is one when there is a “rapid multiplication of indigenous churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment” (Garrison 2004:21). While it has been observed that there are numerously so-defined CPMs in places such as India and China, there are none that have been observed in the West. This is not due to a total lack of interest among Western Christians, for the zeal and for the desire to evangelize their home communities can be witnessed in the innumerable amount of time and money invested in trying to understand and develop the field of church growth.

Garrison states that CPMs “reproduce rapidly” meaning that newly planted churches are starting new church plants themselves very quickly. Second, movements obtain a high level of “multiplicity” in their church plants. That is, they are not just adding new congregations, but that the new congregations are adding congregations, often multiple congregations at once. Third, the church plants are “indigenous,” meaning that the church has grown from within rather than being planted by an outsider. The churches look, act, and feel as though they are homegrown. Fourth,
the movements occur within the people groups or interrelated population segments that the members have in common. Though they are not bound to these groups with the movements crossing these boundaries, they start in their shared cultural setting (Garrison 2004:21-23).

Why Study Church Planting Movements?

When Matthew records the resurrected Christ’s last words to his remaining eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16-20), he firmly places the imperative nature of Christ’s command on the statement “make disciples” (Culver 1968:252). Since that proclamation two thousand years ago the Christian church has existed to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:16-20, known as the Great Commission has served as the foundation for not only the individual believer but for the Church body as a whole. The text is a stark reminder that the main purpose for the existence of the Church is to “make disciples.” The Church is here to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and make disciples for him and his cause. Church planting movements have shown an incredible ability to do just that, to “make disciples.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church finds a further reason to study church planting movements because of their biblical focus to make disciples of Christ before his soon return, and because they are partners in the supernatural proclamation of the everlasting gospel as described in Revelation 14 and specifically the tri-angelic message of Revelation 14:6-13. It should be noted that commentators have shown that the phrase “those who dwell on the earth,” found in Rev 14:6, is a technical term that is used specifically in Revelation to refer to unbelievers (Stefanovic 2002:38; Beale 1990:290), and that the proclamation of the message is described as being demographically communicated “to every nation and tribe and language and people.” By nature of the Adventist Church’s sense of a divine call to proclaim this particular message, it follows that church planting movements would be of significant interest to the Adventist Church and consequently a key focus of the Church.

In this article, we will compare three church planting initiatives in Western Australia, namely the initiatives of the Western Australia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Churches of Western Australia, and the 121 Degrees Church Planting Network, to ascertain whether multiplicative movements of indigenous church plants could emerge within Western Australia. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has its roots in the Seventh-day Anabaptist movement in England as well as the Seventh-day Baptist Church in the United States (Ball 2009). The Baptist Churches of WA have a rapidly expanding school system and a history of effectively reaching Australians for Jesus Christ. They have been
one of the few mainline Protestant denominations in Australia to show an indicative level of growth in the period from 1996 to 2001. Finally, the 121 Degrees Church Planting Network is an initiative that can be traced to church planters trained through Sydney Anglican Moore College and the Ministerial Training Scheme.

The research method that was used in this paper was to interview key leaders within each church network that have been involved in creating and developing their respective church planting strategy. These interviews provided a structured opportunity to explore the different church planting strategies, and resulted in an overview of three strategies that have been developed and some of the common challenges faced in Western Australia.

This paper uses tools and definitions provided by David Garrison and Steve Addison on church planting movements (see the appendix for their lists of defining characteristics of movements). This article will, to the best of the authors’ ability, use them to gain as best an understanding as possible of the networks being studied. It is however acknowledged that there is a limited capacity that these tools and definitions provide and the different societal nuances of which they are derived. It is however believed that a greater understanding of the possibility of movements can be of a great use to the Adventist Church and its mission to effectively make disciples.

**List of Definitions**

SDAC(WA) Seventh-day Adventist Church, Western Australian Conference
BCWA Baptist Churches of Western Australia
CPM Church Planting Movement

**Seventh-day Adventist Church Planting Strategy in WA**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded as a missional church planting movement. Its denominational structure was developed to best support this global mission with a centralized system and tithe base to pay ministers. The tithe was used to pay ministers, not to oversee local congregations, but to support and enable ministers to move into new territories, run evangelism, establish a new congregation with lay leaders, and then to repeat the process. Russell Burrill shares that it was the Adventist Church’s view that local congregations did not require a pastor, so that the tithe could be used to further the movement. The local lay leadership cared predominantly for the church with which they belonged. Unfortunately, today the system that was developed for a church planting movement now supports local pastors to oversee congregations (Burrill 1999:47-77).
West Australia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Globally, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has shown significant growth since its organization (as of December 2006, the church had 15,155,806 baptized members). The Adventist Church though, like CPMs and many other Christian denominations, is growing at a far greater speed in the developing world as opposed to the Western nations (Jenkins 2002). To rectify this situation the Adventist Church, in parts of the West, has progressively been adopting a more proactive church planting strategy, generally with the goal of church growth rather than specifically reigniting the Adventist movement.

The SDAC (WA) Vision

In last five years, the Western Australia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been instilling a mission of “renewing the Adventist movement” in Western Australia. It is a key theme that the conference has been promoting through the local churches, through various forms of media communication, proclamation through preaching, and through training of both the lay members and clergy. The key vision for the conference is summarized as “20/20 Vision,” which is to have 20,000 Adventist disciples by 2020, with the Adventist Church in WA consisting of 200 churches and 2000 groups. Currently the SDAC (WA) consists of 40 churches with a membership of approximately 5,700. There is no prescribed formula or strategy for how or where these churches will exist or function. Rather the conference is asking that the members spend time in prayer and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the how and where they are to start a new church.

The SDAC (WA) strategy looks to encourage people through the promotion of their theme “renewing the Advent movement in Western Australia” and by empowering and equipping church members to live out the SDAC (WA) mission statement which reads, ‘creating significant lives by transforming communities” to “reach up, reach across and reach out.” The main strategy of SDAC (WA) is to allow members to have freedom in the calling of the Holy Spirit. That is, that those who feel called to plant churches are coached, empowered, and equipped to do so in the way that they feel called. This strategy is focused through the SDAC (WA) vision casting, training, and coaching members to plant churches. SDAC (WA) trains their church planters through numerous avenues, most significantly by providing each church plant a coach, while “Church Planting Summits” are held over a long weekend early each year.

The SDAC (WA) strategy also includes financial assistance for those wanting to start a church. Financial viability has been flagged by Stetzer as a major concern for church planters and their team (Stetzer 2011).
financial assistance consists of a financial grant, calculated as 75 percent of the received tithe from the church plant, which is returned to the group, thus aiding the members in their running costs of the new outreach and freeing up capital for evangelism. The SDAC (WA) also requires that the church plant fill in a project plan, which outlines the plant’s intended demographic group, evangelism strategy, and individual vision for the plant. This project plan is designed to aid in keeping the plants accountable in their mission and vision and also for financial accountability.

There has been a recognition and understanding within the SDAC (WA) of the importance of prayer in developing a CPM. Subsequently a very intentional culture of prayer is being built around encouraging and empowering members to make prayer an ordinary part of life. The conference also recognizes the benefit of intercessory prayer and encourages church plants to have established churches praying for them. The Adventist strategy also recognizes there is plenty of room for improvement in developing an extraordinary prayer life, as is suggested by Garrison.

The SDAC (WA) has found that the most difficult areas of creating a church planting movement is achieving reproducibility in the church plants, the development of lay leadership, and gaining rapid reproduction. One of the key differences between church growth and movements is the rapid reproduction and reproducibility of its church plants. Interestingly these two characteristics are intrinsically connected to the issue of lay leadership and development. This problem should not be unexpected, as many Protestant denominations have struggled with grasping the fullness of what it means to implement a sound theology of “the priesthood of all believers,” yet Garrison has shown that it is vital to being able to effectively and rapidly reproduce church plants (2004:189). The conference has noted these weaknesses and is prioritizing the training and development of lay leaders.

The President of the SDAC (WA), Pastor Glenn Townend, has recognized that for a church planting movement to be successful in Western Australia its top five characteristics must be (1) strong spirituality, (2) members who are very committed to the network, (3) planters who realize the goal is multiplicity, (4) continued freedom to use adaptive methods, and (5) having strong contagious relationships.

The Baptist Church Planting Strategy in WA

While the Baptist churches have shown significant growth, both nationally and in the State of Western Australia, wide-scale church planting strategies played a limited part of this growth in the last couple of decades. More recently, it is becoming a major focus of Baptist unions in all Australian states. Leaders from across Australia met for the first time...
in 10-15 years to discuss the national strategy, and the conclusion was that each state should develop its own strategy. In just the last 3-4 years, church planting coordinators have been appointed by unions in all of the states.

The BCWA vision is to establish 130 growing, healthy Baptist churches by 2016, which will mean that 25 new churches or congregations would be planted during the five-year period. This is in harmony with the BCWA mission, which is to build healthy churches within the State. The vision for planting churches will be cast throughout the denomination through a variety of communication media, such as promotional literature, the denominational newsletter, websites, and vision-casting messages presented at churches, assemblies, and church health consultancy meetings.

As the Baptist Churches of WA is a union of autonomous Baptist congregations, the BCWA church planting strategy is to encourage and support local Baptist churches to plant churches. The understanding and experience of the Baptist leaders is that church plants need support and accountability to become viable and healthy, and that this is best done by local congregations. Thus, church planting is incubated and fostered within local Baptist churches, where teams of people who feel called by God to plant churches are encouraged and sent out to plant other churches.

The BCWA strategy involves identifying such church planting teams and re-orienting these teams to be focused on people who have not made a commitment to Jesus Christ and who are not involved in a church. This involves engaging with a specific demographic community and developing needs-based ministries within that community. To effectively reach that particular community, the church planting team would need to understand that these church plants could take a variety of forms, such as church plants that form another congregation or campus of an existing church, distinct congregations that meet in houses or community halls to begin with, or other adaptive church communities that congregate according to the gathering patterns of the community within which the church plant is being formed.

One of the key beliefs of BCWA is that their church planting strategy and focus needs to be demographically-based. While disciples of Jesus are called to share the gospel with all cultures and generations, and the gospel fundamentally unites these cultures and generations into new covenant community, the BCWA church planting leaders have observed that the gospel is propagated more efficiently and effectively through culturally homogeneous communities. In this way, demographic church planting can work through the natural relationship networks that exist within a community. Another significant reason why the BCWA views demographically-based church planting to be the most effective approach
is that many people within Australian churches and society are close to reaching the maximum capacity of their relationship quotient, due to time constraints that most people are faced with. As a result of having limited space in their relationship life, it is more effective to work through new natural relationship networks rather than encourage people to attempt to work across relational networks with limited personal relationship space.

From the experience of the Baptist church planting leaders, church planting teams can often feel that they lack support and resources, which lead to a loss of morale over time and possible abandonment of a church planting initiative. Hence, a significant aspect of the BCWA strategy is to ensure that this support is maintained. Using the philosophy that churches plant churches, the key spiritual and leadership support in the Baptist strategy will come from the established sending church. The Union itself will provide additional support in the area of providing coaching and mentoring through consultation with the administration team, formal church planting training at the Vose Seminary, as well as legal and risk management support. The Union is also considering developing networking opportunities, such as conference events, for church planting teams to meet other teams who are at a similar stage in order to share their stories and church planting experiences.

Pastor Philip Bryant, the Church Health Consultant for BCWA, identified the top five characteristics for healthy church plants to be (1) commitment to prayer, (2) strong missional purpose, (3) significant lay involvement, (4) commitment to Scripture and being biblical followers of Jesus, and (5) strong, inclusive leadership.

The 121 Degrees Network

Background

The 121 Degrees Network is a young, grassroots church planting network that was launched in 2009 from the discussions of a number of key Christians, namely Rory Shiner, Nigel Gordon, and Steve McAlpine, who felt called to plant mission-oriented churches in Perth. The name of the network is derived from geographical fact that Perth is 121 degrees southeast of Jerusalem. The 121 Degrees Network exists to foster and support church planting within Perth because its leaders see that “Perth is functionally a missionary context, where rates of belief in the gospel are so low and the gap between traditional churches and contemporary citizens is so wide that mission-tactics are required in order to reach people with the gospel.”

The network currently consists of about five church plants, of which Providence Church is a key member church, and for this the purpose of
this article will be used as an illustrative example of the types of church plants involved in the network.

The Example of Providence Church

Providence Church is an innovative church plant distributed across Perth that was established by a team of church planters from St. Matthews Anglican Church in Shenton Park, WA. Like the 121 Degrees Network, it also arose out the discussions of about four or five Christians who had developed a passion for reaching Perth. It should be noted, that while there is a significant overlap in the leadership of the 121 Degrees Network and Providence Church, they are not identical.

Providence Church has developed a hybrid worship approach, with groups of Christians meeting weekly in mini-churches in their homes. Once a month, though, the whole Providence Church gathers for a corporate worship that is currently held at the West Perth Anglican Church. The motivation for developing this hybrid approach is that it allows the church to share life together rather than primarily focusing on planning and executing events. The monthly corporate worship provides the opportunity to continue to cast the vision for the whole church and for fellowship to be experienced throughout the wider church community.

Providence Church has a three-fold mission philosophy summarized as 3G—Gospel Telling, Gospel Community, and Gospel Deeds. In line with the third element of their mission philosophy, members of Providence Church are encouraged to devote the time that would normally be committed to planning and executing church events to linking in with community service projects, such as Youth with a Mission Australian Relief and Mercy Services (YWAM ARMS).

While the team that planted Providence Church has incurred personal costs in dedicating their lives to mission, they have commented that they could not return to a regular established church. “At Providence, you feel like your Christian life is much more active,” is a comment that is frequently heard within the church.

The 121 Degrees Church Planting Strategy

While there is a quietly spoken vision of 121 Degrees to plant 100 churches in Perth, the network is a grassroots network that supports and promotes church planting by connecting mission-minded Christians. There is also an underlying strategy that undergirds the existence of 121 Degrees.

The key motivator within the 121 Degrees strategy is the desire to share Jesus and the gospel with people in Perth. In doing this, the network maintains a conservative theological position while being practically radical in
order to effectively share the gospel. The network maintains that church planting needs to be adaptive and that more than one model of church is necessary to share the gospel across the city. In particular, the leadership of 121 Degrees believes that Perth needs indigenous networks, since church planting strategies from the Eastern States of Australia are hard to maintain due to the significant geographical divide and the differences in cultural perspectives and outlook between Western Australia and the Eastern States.

Because 121 Degrees is a grassroots network, the leadership of the church plants is primarily lay leaders. The network itself does not provide any funding for church planting. 121 Degrees has also resisted becoming an organization and prefers to remain a network of mission-minded church planters. The 121 Degrees Network is in the process of developing a five-year plan that may change the way that the church planting network is operated.

The key church planting strategy of 121 Degrees Network is to provide networking opportunities for church planting teams and interested church planters through its annual conference. Smaller regional events are facilitated through its local area networks.

Nigel Gordon, one of the founding leaders of the 121 Degrees Network, identified the top five characteristics for the network as being (1) prayerful dependence, (2) faithfulness to the gospel, (3) personal obedience, (4) multiplication and passing it on, and (5) living the gospel in your own context.

Comparing the Church Planting Strategies

Before we set about answering the opening question as to whether church planting movements can emerge in the West, we will compare the three church planting strategies in order to identify common strengths among all of the strategies as well as common challenges that are faced by all three.

Common Strengths

Regardless of the fact that the three church planting strategies investigated in this paper have different denominational and theological backgrounds, it became very clear, while listening to the key leaders and reading through each network’s material on their vision and strategy, that there were some key similarities and common strengths within all three approaches.

1. A Strong and Growing Commitment to Mission. There is a consistent and growing commitment to mission within all of the church planting strategies. All of the leaders concurred that there was a massive need for
church planting to focus on reaching people who have never heard the gospel or made a commitment to believe in Jesus Christ and follow him.

All of the church planting strategies are committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus and the kingdom of God. The Adventist Church has a commitment to the mission of sharing the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation, which has the everlasting gospel as the foundational core. This mission has motivated the worldwide evangelistic initiatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Adventist church planting strategy in WA acknowledges the growing need to share the everlasting gospel with people locally within this State. The Baptist strategy has a particular commitment to growing the Baptist movement of healthy churches as the fruit of sharing the gospel and the discernible outcome of the growth of the kingdom of God. Similarly, the 121 Degrees Network’s 3G philosophy is centered on the gospel, including Gospel Telling, Gospel Community, and Gospel Deeds, all within the context of the commitment of member churches to mission.

2. The Necessity of Adaptive Approaches in Church Planting. Flowing from a shared commitment to mission, one of the most obvious similarities between all of the strategies is that they all see the necessity of, and encourage the development of, adaptive approaches to church planting. While all three of the networks have historic roots in particular denominational structures, all of them agree that adaptive approaches must be considered and employed in church planting initiatives within Western Australia.

The Adventist strategy does not involve dictating the particular form or structure of the new church plant that is being established. Adventist church planting teams are encouraged to develop their own project plan for planting their church in accordance with the needs and social styles of the communities where the churches are being planted. One of the fundamental concepts within the Baptist philosophy and strategy is that “churches plant churches.” In spite of the fact that there is a natural tendency for churches to replicate their structures in the process of church planting, the Baptist strategy is to re-orient church planting teams to focus more on the communities within which the teams are planting these churches, rather than simply replicating the church environment that the teams have been accustomed to. This fits well within the Baptist philosophy that each local church is an autonomous body, as well as being demographically aware of the community within which the new church is being planted. From the perspective of the leaders of the 121 Degrees Network, member churches are committed to being practically radical in order to efficiently share the gospel with communities. Hence, they are willing to innovate in order to be missional, as can be seen from the example of Providence Church.

The fundamental motivation for encouraging and experimenting with
adaptive approaches to church planting is because all of the church planting strategies recognize the need to develop indigenous church planting initiatives that are focused on specific demographics within society in WA. All of the networks understand that traditional church styles and structures may not necessarily be effective in achieving the mission of sharing the gospel. Hence, the statement that our missiology must shape our ecclesiology (Hirsch and Frost 2003:16).

Common Challenges

Listening to leaders within all three of the movements described in this paper also gave opportunity to identify common challenges that church planting initiatives face within Western Australia. It is valuable to distill these challenges.

1. Individualistic Nature of Australian Society. One of the key challenges that is faced within WA, and indeed Western countries in general, is the marked individualism that can occur within society. Financial pressures, long working hours, and development of various communication technologies can all serve to isolate individuals within society, removing people from more natural, face-to-face communal environments. This individualism can impede the spread of the gospel through communities, and hence slow the multiplication rate of church plants.

Both the Baptist and the Seventh-day Adventist experience is that church planting has been most successful in ethnic communities, such as the Karen and Sudanese communities. Also, it appears that church planting movements elsewhere in Australia and the Western world have been most successful in ethnic and lower socio-economic demographics. This appears to parallel Christ’s own ministry, which had the greatest receptivity amongst fishermen, tax collectors, and prostitutes and was acknowledged in his own teaching (see Luke 14:12-24). While this certainly gives us reason to pause for reflection and confirms a significant demographic factor in the effectiveness of church planting movements, Jesus’ command to go and make disciples of all nations remains (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47; Rom 1:5; Rev 14:6).

2. Need to Make Sacrifices as Disciples. Another key challenge is that effective church planting requires sacrifice. This includes a commitment to prayer, being intentional about evangelism in spite of the high possibility of rejection, as well as the need to be willing to sacrifice the comfort of a friendship network within an existing church to step out in faith and plant a new church.

3. Addressing Key Denominational Concerns. Beyond concerns regarding the plausibility of CPMs emerging within Western cultures, there are also key concerns by denominational leaders and administrations regarding
how such movements can effectively operate within their specific denominational fold (Cole 2010:165-252). For example in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, these concerns include whether CPMs can maintain doctrinal purity and avoid becoming theologically contaminated with heresy, whether such movements will continue to support the denomination financially, and who will baptize people within CPMs and when (Adams 2010:110-113).

4. Maintaining Doctrinal Purity. The concern about doctrinal purity and the risk that a CPM may become contaminated with heresy is the most common and troubling concern for many denominational leaders and administrations (Cole 2010:223; Adams 2010:110). However, it should be noted that the denominational structures that have been developed in the last few centuries have not solved this issue. Doctrinal impurities can even creep into churches that have ordained pastors at the helm and one can point to examples of seminaries that have become effective breeding grounds for certain heresies.

The fundamental question is how truth and its purity can be preserved within a church. The biblical promise in response to this question is that the Paraclete is the divinely ordained person to teach Jesus’ disciples all things and to guide them into all truth (John 14:26, 16:13). The Psalmist also identifies the key role that the Scriptures play in maintaining purity (Ps 119:9-11). In fact, Paul states that the Bible was inspired for the very purpose of training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:15, 16). Consequently, it is essential that leaders of CPMs foster a lifelong commitment to personal and community Bible study, to ongoing communication with the Holy Spirit, and obedience to him. In fact, these disciplines can be modeled effectively in the participatory worship styles that are associated with CPMs. Church leaders need to demonstrate a greater trust in the Holy Spirit and his role in guiding disciples into all truth using the Scriptures, and they should develop easily reproducible training methods to develop essential disciplines like Bible reading and conversational prayer, that cultivate spiritual growth.

In addition to these essential disciplines, denominationally-founded CPMs can utilize structured Bible study series that can introduce young disciples to their key teachings. For example, the Simple Church, which is a Seventh-day Adventist house church movement originating in Florida, requires core leaders to complete a recognized Seventh-day Adventist systematic Bible study series as well as affirm their commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs annually (Adams 2010:111, 132). Hence, it can be seen that the concern about doctrinal purity can be mitigated both biblically and practically.

5. Maintaining Financial Support of the Denomination. Another major
concern that denominational leaders have regarding church planting movements is whether movements that are launched by their particular denomination will continue to support the denomination financially (Cole 2010:242; Adams 2010:112). By their very nature, CPMs can give denominational leaders the impression that they will simply become runaway movements, with new groups and leaders within the movement becoming totally absorbed in propagating the movement and ignoring the need to support the denomination that provided the initial resources to launch the movement.

Our observation is that this is primarily a discipleship issue. If new disciples and leaders within the movement are discipled from the start to financially support the denomination through their tithes and offerings, this will become part of the culture of the movement from its inception (Adams 2010:132). At the same time, it is important to determine the best way to communicate the reason for returning this financial support and to communicate this in ways which can be understood within the movement. For example, new disciples can be taught that part of the vision of the movement is to financially contribute to the growth of the movement, and that their sacrificial giving supports the leaders within the network that are training an expanding pool of leaders that are growing the movement elsewhere. Interestingly, for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, this actually shifts the motivation for financial support back to the original reason for returning tithes and offerings.

6. The Who and When Issue of Baptism. Traditionally, the Christian Church has seen the ordinance of baptism to be administered by those that are trained or ordained clergy. This, however, stands at odds with CPMs that discourage the need for formal clergy to oversee local congregations. Cole presents an argument which favors the CPM’s perspective by arguing that true biblical baptism was not reserved for a select few but rather was to be administered by any committed disciple of Jesus Christ (Cole 2010:95). The discipleship, training, and ordination of church planters who are in good standing, and potentially ordaining them as elders of the church should allow them to adequately oversee the discipling of new believers, including the practice of their baptism.

CPMs are also renowned for baptizing disciples earlier rather than later in their discipleship path. Adams states that “in most Church Planting Movements, baptism is not delayed by lengthy discipleship requirements. On the contrary, discipleship typically precedes conversion and continues indefinitely” (Adams 2010:176). The delaying of baptism has the potential to lead the new convert to delay their sharing of their new found faith with others. CPMs rely on new believers to quickly turn from being consumers of the Word to sharers of the Word.
Can Church Planting Movements Emerge in the West?

So we finally return, after analyzing three case studies, to our original question: Can church planting movements emerge in Western Australia? Historically there has been clear evidence of church planting movements in North America. The Methodists and Baptists conquered the frontier in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and it should also be noted that a Seventh-day Adventist church planting movement formed in North America and was notably successful in the first one hundred years of its formation. But the relevancy to starting a CPM in the West today is minimal. It is clear that the world, and the West in particular, is a very different place to the time of the “Second Great Awakening.” We need to address the difficulties currently being experienced and the areas that we need to focus on in the future.

The church planting strategists who were interviewed for this article responded to this question in different ways. The Seventh-day Adventist vision is to renew an Adventist church planting movement within Western Australia. However, there have been difficulties experienced in the areas of rapidly mobilizing new believers to plant reproducible churches, and the Adventist church administration is considering ways to address these areas. Hence, the Adventist perspective is that a church planting movement can emerge, but that the necessary factors for the development of such movements need to be actualized. The Baptist response was that Australia is anthropologically very different to Asia, Africa, and South America, which is where the majority of church planting movements have appeared recently, and hence it would not be appropriate to expect the same type of movements to emerge in Australia. That is not to say that the Baptist perspective is that church planting movements cannot occur in Australia, but rather that the nature and rate of mobilization of movements would not be identical. The leadership of the 121 Degrees Church Planting Network is also studying church planting movements and seeking to implement the key characteristics. At this stage, the rate of reproduction of church plants within the 121 Degrees network has not been as rapid as desired. The perspective of the 121 Degrees leaders is that God will create the movement, and that the role of the people within the network is to be faithful to the call that God has given them.

Difficulties in the West

The responses from church planting strategists in WA match the observations of experienced church planters elsewhere in the Western world. Stetzler and Garrison have identified five key areas of difficulties that planters face in starting a CPM in the Western world (Stetzer and Garrison 2008:34).
1. *The non-communal culture of the industrialized West.* The Western world lives a very individualistic and isolated life, inhibiting the potentially rapid spread of the gospel to a large audience.

2. *The professionalization of ministry and the clergification of the church.* While the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is held by all of the networks and Protestantism in general, the networks still find it hard to put aside the long held, in-built culture of clergification. It is a necessity for rapid growth that the lay members are empowered and held accountable to be sent out into the mission field.

3. *The lack of intentional evangelism.* Our perception is that this is an area of difficulty for all of the networks. Garrison advocates the need for intentional evangelism in the form of both mass and personal evangelism.

4. *The lack of intentional reproduction of church plants.* Church plants in CPMs that have not planted another church within a certain time frame are deemed to be a failure. There is an expectation that the church plant will plant again in the very near future within church planting movements.

5. *The drift towards theological bankruptcy.* While we have not observed this to be an issue for any of the networks studied, it is a real risk for churches in the West. The watering down of the authority of God’s Word brings nothing but bankruptcy in all aspects of church and church life.

**Areas to Focus On**

We have seen some of the difficulties that are faced in the West when wanting to initiate a CPM, but there are indelible principles that may help the networks precipitate change towards becoming a rapidly reproducing CPM, as identified by Stetzer and Garrison.

1. *Abundant prayer that is intercessory in nature.* All of the networks acknowledged the importance and place of prayer and fervent spirituality in their movement. They have been seen to be progressing in building this abundant prayer life in their members but need to continually worked on this to make it a cultural norm within the network.

2. *Abundant, intentional evangelism.* There is never a church that can say that it does too much evangelism or focuses too strongly on evangelism, for that is after all the purpose of the church. Evangelism should be lived out by all the members of the network, in their schools, workplaces, and from the pulpit.

3. *Intentional empowering of the laity.* Possibly the greatest need for the churches to gain reproducibility and multiplication is that of empowering the laity. Empowering the laity is risky as it is taking the control out of the hands of paid pastoral staff and placing it in the hands of laity who, without guidance of the Holy Spirit and strong coaching, could go astray.
4. Intentional planting of reproducible churches. Churches must be planted that are designed to reproduce and reproduce efficiently within their target demographic group or sector of society.

5. Maintain theological strength. A movement needs a faithful interpretation and application of God’s Word that speaks to their culture and life. (Stetzer and Garrison 2004:35)

Once again, it can be seen that there is strong agreement between Stetzer and Garrison and the local church planting strategists that are based here in Western Australia. Peter Roennfeldt has noted that in Australia “there are concerted efforts to foster environments and support those prepared to do something” with the view of spontaneous movements emerging (2011:16, 17). While there may be systemic difficulties in rapidly reproducing churches based on traditional structures, Roennfeldt’s perspective is that movements of fresh expressions can be launched when mission-minded Christians in Australia recover the biblical principles of disciple-making movements and are willing to be adaptable to their context (Roennfeldt 2011:17). Ott and Wilson also find strong agreement with Stetzer and Garrison in their research. They state that “the most commonly attested belief among people who are directly involved with CPMs is that these are amazing movements of God ordained special interventions,” and that “of vital concern should be the spiritual health and fervor of the initial disciples, leaders and churches” (Ott and Wilson 2011:73).

Conclusion

Based on our investigation, the church planting strategies the WA Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, of the Baptist Churches of WA, and the 121 Degrees Network all contain the key elements that are necessary for church planting movements to emerge in Western Australia. The first essential element of all three church planting strategies is a high commitment to mission and being theologically true to the Bible. The second essential element that these networks share is the commitment of the three networks to adaptive approaches, which focus on developing church communities that are appropriate for the specific demographic.

However, for all three networks, there are important areas for the networks to focus on. Our conclusion is that these areas include (1) fostering an abundant prayer culture within each network, (2) promoting intentional evangelism that is carried out by every person in the church community, (3) empowering the laity to take primary leadership of the movement, and (4) developing easily reproducible church plants. By developing these areas within the networks, the tantalizing possibility of church planting movements emerging in Western Australia can be significantly increased.

To respond directly to the question that this paper posed, our perspec-
tive is that the answer needs to be a cautious and qualified “yes.” There are significant anthropological differences between Australia and nations where church planting movements are rapidly emerging. There is also the challenge for individual Christians and broader Christian communities to foster intense spirituality and obedience as well as intentionally share their faith in a highly secular and materialistic society like Australia. However, there are promising signs that there are mission-minded Christians in Western Australia who are willing to explore the concept of church planting movements and cultivate the environments that will allow these movements to flourish. As we conclude, we are also reminded of Jesus’ own words: “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (John 4:35). While the human perspective needs to be a cautious “yes,” Jesus’ own vision of the spiritual harvest gives us confidence that the divine promise in Jesus is a resounding “Yes!” (2 Cor 1:20).

Works Cited


Appendix

David Garrison identifies the following ten characteristics of church planting movements (Garrison 2004:172; Stetzer and Garrison 2010:3):

1. Prayer;
2. Abundant Gospel Sowing;
3. Intentional Church Planting;
4. Scriptural Authority;
5. Local Leadership;
6. Lay Leadership;
7. Cell or House Churches;
8. Churches Planting Churches;
9. Rapid Reproduction; and

Steve Addison has identified the following five broad characteristics of movements (Addison 2009:22-24):

1. White-hot Faith
2. Commitment to a Cause
3. Contagious Relationships
4. Rapid Mobilization
5. Adaptive Methods

By comparing these lists, it can be seen that there is significant overlap in the characteristics that Garrison and Addison have identified.
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