

CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT-CITY-LARGE CITY, CHINA

Place: Suburb of Large City, China, Many of the citizens work in the steel mills of Large City.

The Strategy Coordinator for this city, while in language study, met a young Christian Chinese lady (Martha) who later introduced the SC to her best friend (Mary). Near the middle of March they (Mary, Martha, and the SC) had lunch together. It was then that the SC learned that Mary was leading a very fast-growing unregistered church in a suburb town near the target city. She was also discipling Martha. As they talked the SC discovered that Mary was also secretly discipling other believers and house church leaders inside the SCs target city. The SC tells his story.

"This CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENT can best be understood in terms of the prayer which undergirded it and undergirds it still.

1. As we were evaluating our call, we asked God to put us on the cutting edge of missions. We meant that we wanted to work in a place and under conditions that made and kept us utterly dependent on God. We wanted very much to be involved in reaching those who had never heard the Gospel, those in the far regions of the earth (World A).

2. Knowing that God is about redeeming mankind from "every nation, tongue, and tribe," we asked that God show us what HE was doing in our area and then pull us on board. Although our job was to strategize, plan, and implement efforts toward the evangelization of a major unevangelized population segment, our desire was to learn where God was already at work and then be available for use in HIS plan with our people and area.

3. We asked God to do something so supernatural that it could be explained only by the fact that God did it, and with that, something that would last, but would not be dependent on the missionary or his having to "get it done or keep it going."

"Mary had graduated from a seminary near Large City 7 years previous to our meeting. After graduation she had returned to her home town of Large City to start a new church. She was displeased with the local TSPM church which was not progressive nor reaching out to begin churches or evangelize the area. Mary started with 14 people from the area and the church had grown to over 1000 in weekly attendance. She had continued to quietly (secretly) disciple dedicated and willing believers, knitting their hearts together to carry on the work of the gospel. But her vision and the progress of the work had come to outstrip her strength, resources, and abilities.

She asked for help!

In December prior to our meeting in March, Mary had planned a Christmas event and trained people to present three nights of drama on the birth of Christ. Their church building held only 300 people (fully packed), but an additional 300 gathered outside each night. The first presentation of the drama created such excitement that the news reached the offices of the Mayor and the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) Director. Just prior to the beginning of the second night the Mayor and the RAB director accosted her outside the building and inquired of the affair, citing crowd control as a major issue. They insisted that she go in and make a place for them to sit and observe. She refused, saying, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross. First come, first served. If you want seats, you will have to go in and tell the people to leave. I will not." And she walked away. So in mid-afternoon the next day the officials sent staff to hold front row seats before the crowd arrived. From that time on the PSB attended the services and watched her closely.

At the end of February the Mayor and RAB director called her in and told her that they had been watching her. They stated that she seemed to have no political agenda, and taught only what was in the Bible. She affirmed that was the case and wanted to know what they really wanted. They told her that they knew of religious fanaticism (interpretation: rebellious toward the state) in other parts of China, particularly among the peasant population (villagers and farmers). Because of her singular allegiance to the Bible with no political slant or activity, they were assigning her the responsibility of going out to the villages to "disciple them, so they will not become enemies of the state." She politely refused, citing lack of time due to the demands of a large congregation (at this time numbering over 1000 in weekly attendance). They insisted; she declined. They insisted the third time, indicating that she had no choice in the matter. "Just see that it gets done," they concluded.

Two weeks later, in the providence of God, we met. As we became more acquainted over lunch that day God bound our hearts together in a unique and wonderful way. Telling me the story above, she asked me for help. I suggested that we take two weeks to fast and pray and get together after that to discuss what God had shown us. I told her that it appeared to me that God had caused the government leaders to give her the freedom to do that which was normally prohibited--widely evangelize and train people in the whole region. I reminded her that this was the great task of the church, and that a great opportunity lay before them. I suggested they remember this as they pray over the matter.

After our time of prayer and fasting we came together with great excitement about the opportunities and challenges. We agreed that God had indeed granted an unparalleled opportunity. With both time, travel, and financial constraints as mitigating factors, I suggested that it would be easier to bring the trainees to a central location rather than the trainers go to the towns and villages. They agreed and we began to plan and develop a Discipleship Training Center (DTC) ministry. They agreed that she would contact the house church movement leaders, and the SC would prepare plans and materials for training the house church leaders.

Soon after we had engaged in the planning process, Mary invited me to meet with the Mayor and RAB chief for discussion of possible business interaction. Since my work in China involved business, education, medicine, sports, and crisis consultation, we were able to discuss the prospect of future foreign business coming to their town. I explained that I was a Christian and would only recommend a Christian company to come. To my surprise, during this conversation the RAB chief asked me directly to help the church leadership to find some way to do a joint venture with a foreign company, and then as a Christian, help the church do whatever they needed to do. When I questioned the legality of this arrangement, he cited a notable example of official church relationship with foreigners (Amity) and assured me that there would be no problems. We (my wife, myself, and the church leaders) were all amazed as we saw God do the impossible--have the leading government official invite a foreigner to interact with and assist a church, an unregistered church at that!

Dates were set for the first training far before I thought we were ready. 103 people showed up for the first training time. The conditions were definitely less than desirable. With no other facility available, the old church building served as the training center. The people came out of great personal sacrifice (but with an unbelievable hunger for God). 1) Seventy [70] of the 103 did NOT have a Bible. Fortunately, we were able to help provide them Bibles. 2) They had no place to sleep and no money for food. They stayed in the old church building, sleeping on the benches and floor. The local believers provided one bowl of rice and vegetables per day for each of them. 3) They had no

curriculum materials--none. We provided them with paper and pens, and the leaders taught them directly out of the Scriptures. 4) Sessions were from 10 to 14 hours every day for 20 days.

The first curricula included the following studies:

- 1) Genesis 1-10 --Who is God, the creation, and God's relationship to man?
- 2) The Life of Christ --a study through the gospels clarifying who Jesus is and the whole redemption story.
- 3) Book of Romans --a study to teach the sinfulness of man, and the provision and victory that comes only through Jesus Christ.
- 4) Book of Jonah --a study of God's redemptive purposes for all mankind and the believer's role in fulfilling God's plan (missions and evangelism).

Even under those conditions the response was remarkable, almost incomprehensible. The participants begged the leaders to continue for 10 more days! Nearly exhausted, but elated, they agreed. God's grace was found sufficient for both teacher and student. During this time they taught:

- 5) The Book of Ephesians -- a study of the identity of God's people and the struggle and victory of the Christian.
- 6) How to study the Bible
- 7) How to teach the Bible
- 8) Witness training

In our preparation we had looked ahead to the evaluation and measurement stage. We had agreed upon elements of consideration which would allow us to trace the participants and survey the fruitfulness of the training in their lives. After three months, I met with the church and DTC leadership to assess the results. Here is the report: Follow up was still a bit incomplete, but traceable, measurable evidence revealed that during the three months of August through October, these first participants were responsible for over 1,300 conversions, with over 1,200 of them already baptized. Further, some of the trainees had started three (3) new churches, each composed of nearly 50 new believers. I wept as I listened to the report and related stories. Then we sang, prayed, and praised God together for HIS wondrous work among men.

It should be noted that many factors contributed to the accomplishments noted above, as well as successive results. Along with the DTC ministry a prayer network for our target city and surrounding area was set up in 10 countries. Intercessions were/are carried on weekly on behalf of this target people and the work among them. Thousands of Bibles have been supplied and have made their way into the city, the area, and the DTC. Outstanding curricular materials have been and are being written and provided to the DTC for use in training sessions. Highly qualified Chinese ethnic trainers came in from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore to assist in the DTC training events. These came without suspicion, and with natural language abilities, as well as great training backgrounds and experience.

Let me conclude with this updated synopsis. With some outside help, the congregation was able to build a new building designed to seat 1,200 plus. Attached to the front of that beautiful (especially for China) worship center is a four-story building designed for use as a training center. The entry level houses an office area, a pastor's study and living quarters, and a religious library. The second floor has meeting rooms, a music room and choir training area, a conference room, and a storage area for Bibles and other discipleship training materials. The third floor has a dormitory and bathroom facilities for women trainees. The fourth floor houses a dormitory and bathroom facilities for men. All together, more than a hundred can be

housed at any given time. In addition, adjacent to the larger facility is a kitchen and dining facility that the church also uses for an ongoing day-school ministry.

Many things have changed since we lived and worked there. The kind and good RAB chief was promoted and moved. He was replaced with an unscrupulous sort, and while we never "publicized" all we did, secrecy is now the standard operating procedure. Great pressures and much tension abounds. No outsiders have had a part of the teaching process in more than two years. The pastor and other qualified personnel have assumed all those responsibilities. Further, while some of the training events continue at the DTC home base, due to the political pressures some of the training has been taken on the road. It has proven to be an effective strategy.

The results of the heretofore described ministry is as follows: In three months there were more than 1300 professions of faith, with more than 1200 immediate baptisms. In three months there were 3 new church starts, each with approx. 50 new believers. In seven months there were 15 new church starts (inclusive of the above). In nine months there were 25 new church starts (inclusive of the above). In two years and three months there were 57 new church starts. As of November 1997, there have been over 450 church starts scattered throughout three provinces that have roots in the DTC training events.

As of November 1997, there has been over 18,000 professions of faith, more than 18,000 Bibles and countless other materials distributed, at least 35 "Jesus" films being used throughout the territory; more than 450 new church starts, more than 500 house church leaders given specialized training for teaching and leading their people, and over 1,000 other believers have received Christian growth and evangelism training through the DTC. AND ALL OF THAT IS FULLY INDIGENOUS AND CONTINUING. TO GOD BE THE GLORY...GREAT THINGS HE HATH DONE!

EM

Principles:

1. Prayer was the foundation of what took place. God was at work, and the SC and local leaders recognized and participated in it
2. Lay leadership was targeted and trained
3. Training was kept simple and trained people were taught to act on what they knew
4. A vision and passion were communicated to those trained
5. Foreignness was minimized
6. No barriers of buildings, ordination, etc. was modeled
7. An understanding of the culture was an essential ingredient. Cultural norms were not violated.
8. A servant and partner spirit with national leaders, not directorship nor lordship, undergirded all interaction.