

# Starting “Church-Starting” Churches

By Carol Davis

*Note: Carol Davis is a woman who has been connected to church planting since her childhood. What she learned from the mistakes and the successes can help us all.*

“I have a question I’ve been wanting to ask you for four years,” I said to Charles Brock, author of the *Practice and Principles of Indigenous Church Planting*, when I met him in the Philippines a few years ago. “You plant churches rapidly, they produce leadership from within, they are not dependent on outside funding and they reproduce.”

“I know others plant churches in these same areas. It takes years, the churches stay dependent on outside resourcing, they import leadership, they say, because poverty has destroyed the psyche of the people and they are not leadership quality. These churches do not reproduce.”

“I want to know why you can do it and they can’t.” The question was a burning one, because I had been connected to church planting for many years, but without the speed and rapid reproduction that I saw in Brock’s ministry.

## **Sick, Dead or Sterile**

There were few evangelical churches on the West Coast of the United States when my family moved there in the early 40s. Our small church began to start churches in the Fresno area. My dad would take the family to the new church start. When it was up and going, we would go back to the mother church and soon moved out with another church start.

Later, in the Sacramento area, our small church was planting churches also. When I returned as an adult some 10 years later, I began to realize that only a few of the churches started when I was a child had started another church. Why so few? For the first time, I had to say to myself, “We started churches, and that is good. But we did not start church-starting churches.”

It seemed so simple. I knew that anything that was alive was created to reproduce. It is a natural thing for trees and plants to drop their seeds and spontaneously spring up. There are cells in every living system that are set aside for the next generation. They are called “reproductive cells.” In fact, if an organism does not reproduce, we say it is sick, or dead or sterile.

I finally concluded that we had planted sterile churches. I studied and surveyed four cities on the West Coast and found the same phenomenon. A mother church would go into a new area and plant churches for about 12 to 15 years. But few of those would ever plant another one. What we found is that American churches in general either consider it optional to reproduce or they consider it a two-step process. “First, we are going to grow large enough, get strong enough, and then get ourselves equipped and trained to do the reproduction.” Very few make it to step two.

These observations and realities began to drive the question “why.” Why, when it should be so natural, so spontaneous and so thrilling to reproduce does it tend to be the exception and not the rule? Slowly the answers began to come.

There were several who teachings and ministries influenced my thinking, especially Thom Wolf, with insights on the “Person of Peace” and “Oikos,” Otis and Martha Brady working in Central America, George Patterson, and now, Charles Brock in Manila.

## **The Person of Peace**

In response to my question, Brock said there are two things that make rapid planting and reproduction possible. “First, I wait for the element of the miraculous in every work I start,” he explained. “One day, I thought that a church needed to be started in a specific area of the city. As I went to that area to explore one day, I passed through another community where I saw a woman in a second floor window. I didn’t think much about it, until I came through the region again on my way home. Here she was again in the window.”

“As I got just past her, she called out to me, ‘Sir, are you a Bible man?’ I said, ‘Well, I teach the Bible.’ She asked, ‘Would you teach me and my family?’”

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“I had thought the other area was where I was supposed to go, but it wasn’t. It was here with this family. It catalyzed quickly, because God had prepared it.”

I was ecstatic as I realized he had just given me an example of what Luke 10 talks about as finding “the person of peace.” Jesus told his disciples as they went out that He was sending them where “he himself was going to come.” (NASV) “Whatever house you enter first say, ‘Peace be to this house’ and if a man of peace (or person of peace) is there, your peace will rest upon him... stay in that house eating and drinking whatever they give you... Do not keep moving from house to house.”

What we since found is that most of the time missionaries, pastors, small group leaders and church planters stop before they find this person. They stop when their calendar is filled up instead of keeping their calendar free until their “person of peace” slot is filled up. It is a matter of working on God’s agenda to get spontaneous reproduction.”

## Three Marks

There is no verse that describes what the person of peace looks like. But what we can do is look at people of peace in the Bible – such as Lydia, Cornelius, the demoniac and the woman at the well – and find common threads. Dr. Wolf has done this and observed these three distinguishing marks:

1. **They are receptive.** Not every receptive person is a person of peace. There will be many people along the way who receive Christ before you have found this person. But every person of peace is receptive.
2. **They are people of reputation.** Their reputation may be good or bad. But they are known. The woman at the well had a bad reputation. Cornelius’ reputation was good.
3. **They have influence.** They are people who, when they respond to Christ, will refer others to him. And because of their influence, many will come along with them. Cornelius and Lydia had natural influence. Influence for the demoniac and woman at the well came through their radical life of change.

Let’s look at the demoniac who was crying out from the caves when Jesus came through his town. Jesus cast the demons out into pigs, the pigs went over a cliff, and Jesus was chased out of town. The now cleansed man wanted to go with him. Jesus told him “no,” that he needed to go back home. A few chapters later Jesus comes back to this same region where he had been thrown out, and now everyone wants him. The only difference between those two scenes is that now a cleansed demoniac is living among them, a transformed life that demonstrates every day the power of God to change a life.

## Not 1, but 200

Paul and Silas referred to that circle of influence when they told the Philippian jailer to “believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household (oikos).” Anthropologists tell us that in every culture in every age you have four relationships: family, neighbors, co-workers and friends. The oikos of this person of peace will be impacted by this decision.

We are told that most people in the West have 25 to 30 in their close network of relationships. Each of these people has overlapping circles of influence also. So I can know when I find this person God has prepared, it will immediately impact and influence at least 200 people and many times more.

I don’t see 1 person anymore. I see 200.

This is the precision way to start a “church-starting” church. Precision harvesting is to find the person of peace. Then you are connecting with God’s entry strategy.

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## Look to the 1-Week-Old Christian

The second thing Charles told me was, “I never do anything that a 1-week-old Christian can’t do. If I preached like I did in my home church they would think they couldn’t carry the Gospel until they had my skills, my training or my experience. If I prayed like I did in my home they would think they couldn’t talk with God until they had my words and phrases. I don’t bring a worship leader because if I did they would think they couldn’t worship God until they had someone trained.”

“Everything they see me do, they can do. Sometimes, I don’t get back to the area for several weeks. But since they didn’t know they couldn’t do it, they went and told their cousin in another area and they already had another group started.”

As he explained it, he continues to stay just a week ahead of whatever the emerging leaders need to do the next week. That’s simplicity. That is reproducible.

## ‘Growth’ vs. ‘Reproduction’

I want to show you the difference between what I call a “growth culture” in which we’ve all been trained and a “reproduction model.” Because I believe to plant a church is a different animal than to plant a church-planting church. In fact, I’m convinced that the skill sets we learned in ministry training will actually ensure that things don’t reproduce.

A major difference between the two cultures is what we focus on at the beginning of a new church. The “growth culture” has started on believer’s turf. But in order to reproduce, we must start on unbeliever’s turf. If we want group conversions of family members, co-workers, neighbors and friends, those people are not going to come to a stranger’s house or into the strange setting of a church. They will come to turf where they are already involved.

We’ve typically begun in facilities. This takes money and expertise, which are not readily available. If you begin in homes or front porches or yards or parks, there are always more of them.

We’ve tended to start with celebration in a large group. For reproduction you start with a small group. Very few people actually have the ability and gifts to do a large group well. It takes more expertise, more preparation, more everything. A lot of people can facilitate small groups. They are already doing it in their own natural network before they were saved.

Leadership in the reproduction model is also different. Traditionally, we import professional clergy. But what we need for reproduction is to have indigenous and convert-emerging clergy. Where are the future pastors for this setting? Today, they are in the streets, they are beating their wives, they are ripping off their employers.

Also, in a reproducing church, the leader is the equipper for the emerging leaders, not for all the participants. That is how they see themselves, and that is how they stay focused.

We are used to funding the church starter. But for churches that will start other churches, you need to have bi-vocational church starters. If we are going to see the cities reached, it is going to be with bi-vocational people. Otherwise, it takes too long to actually fund.

In my own experience, every time we got ready to plant a church we felt like we couldn’t afford to lose people, their tithes and their labor. But every time we did, we actually didn’t skip a beat. God supplied. In fact, in every church that I see planting churches, I find that some of their own issues begin to dissolve. I don’t know what it is. They are giving themselves away. I am convinced you cannot out-give God. The more you give, the more God does.

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Growth Paradigm	Reproduction Paradigm
<p><u>Beginning Focus:</u> Church culture reproduction Focus on individual conversions Start on believer’s turf Teach Scripture for information Begin by finding Christians Begin in facilities Start with celebration in a large group Build programs and buildings</p>	<p><u>Beginning Focus:</u> Mission culture Focus on group conversions Start on unbeliever’s turf Teach Scripture for application Begin by finding “people of peace” Begin in homes, front porches, yards, parks Start with a small group Build leaders</p>
<p><u>Leadership:</u> Pastor or Lone Starter Imported professional clergy Leader – of all participants</p>	<p><u>Leadership:</u> Apostolic / Partnership Team Indigenous convert-emerging clergy Equipper – of emerging leaders</p>
<p><u>Finances:</u> Funded Church Starter Heavy Financial Investment Resources Imported for Harvest</p>	<p><u>Finances:</u> Bi-Vocational Church Starter Minimal Financial Investment Resources are in the harvest</p>
<p><u>Structure:</u> Needs of the Church Clergy-Centered / Driven / Dependent Body of Christ... Only</p>	<p><u>Structure:</u> Needs of the Community Lay-Centered / Driven / Dependent Army of God... Also</p>