

How to Pray With Amazing Insight

Universal and Common Elements

Every church multiplication movement (where healthy churches quickly multiply in an ethnic group) in the history of the world has had 10 things in common. These insights can provide great guidelines for us as we pray for parts of the world.

In other words, if "Extraordinary Prayer" has always been present during church multiplication movements (it has!), then we know we should pray for and work toward more prayer in our personal life and in the Church.

Here is a list of the 10 "Universal Elements" that have always been present (according to research done by David Garrison and the International Mission Board). The "Common Factors" list identifies factors that have almost always been present.

If you want more details about each one, check out the explanation below.

UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS

1. Extraordinary Prayer
2. Abundant Evangelism
3. Intentional Planting of Reproducing Churches
4. The Authority of God's Word
5. Local Leadership
6. Lay Leadership
7. Cell/House Church Networks
8. Churches Planting Churches
9. Rapid Reproduction
10. Healthy Churches

COMMON FACTORS

1. A Climate of Uncertainty in Society
2. Insulation from Outsiders
3. A High Cost for Following Christ
4. Bold Fearless Faith
5. Family-Based Conversion Pattern
6. Rapid Incorporation of New Believers
7. Worship in the Heart Language
8. Divine Signs and Wonders
9. On-the-Job Leadership Training
10. Missionaries Suffered

10 UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS EXPLAINED

In every known Church Planting Movement (CPM) around the world, the following 10 elements are always present. It might be possible for a CPM to happen without all of these conditions, but that has not yet been recorded. Anyone who hopes to see a CPM should consider these elements.

1. Prayer

For each known CPM, prayer has been overwhelmingly important. Usually, prayer is the foundation for the missionary's plan of reaching his or her people group, though the health of the missionary's own personal prayer life is crucial. The new church and its leaders will imitate the prayer life it sees in the missionary. Prayer is the greatest resource the missionary brings to the movement, and when it's clear from the beginning that prayer is the missionary's source of power, it makes it easy for the local Christian leadership to share in that power and take ownership of the movement

with prayer.

2. Abundant gospel sowing

“If you sow abundantly, you will also reap abundantly.” There are no known CPMs where evangelism was rare or absent. In CPMs, hundreds and even thousands of people are hearing the claims that Jesus Christ has on their lives. Often, mass media evangelism is spreading the gospel, but there is always an element of personal evangelism with clear testimonies that reveal the power of the gospel to radically change lives.

The opposite is also true. Whenever governments or social forces have been able to eliminate Christian witness, the CPMs have seen dramatic loss or have disappeared altogether.

3. Intentional church planting

For each CPM, there was a specific and intentional strategy for planting churches before the movement began. There have been times when other crucial elements were present, but the movement failed to go forward when the leader lacked either the skill or vision to oversee it. Once this was changed, though, the results were remarkable.

There is evidence around the world of many thousands of people coming to Christ, but these conversions only result in churches and CPMs if there is an intentional strategy for church-planting.

4. Scriptural authority

In each known CPM, the Bible has been the unquestioned authority and guiding force of the church. Even in non-literate cultures where the Bible is received and continued through oral storytelling, the Bible guides doctrine, church policy, and everyday life. Most CPMs had the Bible either orally or written in their own language.

5. Local leadership

If a missionary is seen as the primary church planter or pastor, it is difficult for him to shift out of that role ever again. When the missionary walks alongside the local church planters, they are helping to establish local leadership for the church. It takes self-discipline for a missionary involved in a CPM to mentor local church planters rather than to do the church planting themselves, but their role is still valuable. Local church planters receive some of their best training when they watch a missionary model Bible studies that engage non-Christian seekers.

6. Lay leadership

When a movement relies on seminary-trained or highly educated pastors, the work will always have a leadership shortage. When CPMs rely on lay leaders, there is a larger pool of available church planters and cell church leaders. These men and women usually represent and resemble the societies they serve, and typically also have normal jobs in addition to their work as church planters. As the movement continues, churches will often begin paying pastors, but most of the movement and growth will continue through lay leaders.

7. Cell or house churches

Church buildings do appear in CPMs, but most of the churches continue to be small, reproducible cell churches of 10-30 members who meet in homes or stores.

There is a difference between cell churches and house churches. Cell churches are connected to one another in a type of network that usually combines to create a single church identity. House churches look like cell churches, but they are usually more independent and are not part of a network of connected churches. House churches don't have the structure a cell-church network provides, but they are often more adaptable and active.

Each model has advantages. It is easier to create a unified movement with cell-church networks, but house churches can more easily exist in hostile situations. Both types of churches are common in CPMs, and the even regularly both appear in the same movement.

8. Churches planting churches

In CPMs, the local believers are active in winning the lost and planting new churches. The first churches in a CPM are usually planted by missionaries or leaders that the missionaries trained, but when the movement really starts to multiply, it's because the churches are planting churches on their own. For this to happen, the local church members have to believe that it is natural and simple to start a new church, and that no outside help is needed.

9. Rapid reproduction

Most church planters involved in CPMs believe that rapid reproduction is required for the movement to continue. They argue that when reproduction slows down, the CPM weakens. When a movement is reproducing quickly, it shows how urgent and important it is to come to faith in Christ. When reproduction is happening quickly, it is certain that the churches are not being weighed down with unnecessary elements and that the local leadership is confident and capable of participating in this work of God.

10. Healthy churches

Most church-growth experts agree that a healthy church should demonstrate the following five purposes: worship; evangelistic and missionary outreach; education and discipleship; ministry; and fellowship. Each known CPM shows evidence of these five core functions.

Many church planters believe that when these five health indicators are strong, the church naturally grows. Though more could be said about each indicator, for a CPM, the significant factor is the church's missionary outreach. Through this impulse, churches are extending the gospel among remote people groups and are overcoming barriers that have continually withstood Western missionary efforts.

10 COMMON FACTORS EXPLAINED

Beyond the 10 universal elements found in every Church Planting Movement, there are at least 10 frequently, though not universally, found characteristics. These are not listed in any particular order of priority or frequency. Most CPMs see most (if not all) of these factors.

1. Worship in the heart language

Even in CPMs where the Bible is not yet available in the local language, these movements are still using their language in their prayers, songs, sermon illustrations and discussions. When the churches worship in their own language, the entire community has access and everyone can participate in forming the church. Because there is a deep connection between the heart language of a people and their worldview, missionaries who identify and embrace the language of the people

they are trying to reach are in a better position to stimulate a CPM. Missionaries who rely on an outside or trade language will find a barrier between themselves and the hearts of the people they are seeking to reach.

2. Evangelism has communal implications

CPMs tend to rely on strong family and social connections, unlike the emphasis in the West on individualism and personal commitment. Missionaries involved in CPMs recognize these strong social ties, and encourage new believers to pursue those bonds to draw new believers into the community of faith (see Acts 16:31-31). Often, the churches consist of family units led by the family's head.

3. Rapid incorporation of new converts into the life and ministry of the church

In most CPMs, a new believer is expected to be involved in the life and ministry of the church immediately. Discipleship generally begins before conversion and continues indefinitely, while the new believer also begins discipling others and even planting churches. To maintain outward growth, CPM-minded missionaries will often encourage new believers to join or help start new churches rather than attend existing congregations.

4. Passion and fearlessness

CPMs are characterized by boldness and a sense of urgency, which emphasizes the importance of salvation and the necessity of conversion. Believers demonstrate fearlessness in the face of opposition. A spirit of timidity or fear cripples or stops a CPM entirely. Boldness may invite persecution, but it fuels a CPM (see Joshua 1:6).

5. A price to pay to become a Christian

Often, CPMs emerge in settings where conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ is not easy, popular, or safe to do. In many cases, conversion leads to severe persecution or even death. Because of this pressure, those who are not committed to the gospel tend to abandon the faith, and those who remain demonstrate a high level of dedication. In the face of persecution, believers find strong support in the testimony of Jesus and the New Testament church (see Matthew 10:17-25).

6. Perceived leadership crisis or spiritual vacuum in society

The removal of long-held symbols of stability and security prompts individuals to reconsider matters of eternal significance. Major political or social upheaval, war, natural disaster or displacement are all catalysts that prepare a country or people group for a CPM. Breakdowns in society are becoming common in this changing world, and this means more areas are ready for a church planting movement.

7. On-the-job training for church leadership

In a rapidly increasing CPM, leaders need to be trained while still present and focused on their churches. Effective training is vital to the success of the movement, but if leaders have to leave for extended periods for training, the momentum of the movement will be hurt. The most beneficial training combines practical education with ongoing ministry.

The forms of this integrated training vary from field to field, but often include several short-term training modules that do not hurt the primary tasks of evangelism, church planting and pastoral leadership. Even beyond the initial training, missionaries have agreed that ongoing leadership development will contribute to continued growth and strong

development of a CPM.

8. Leadership authority is decentralized

For a CPM to succeed, each cell or house church leader should have the authority it needs for evangelism, ministry and planting new churches. A CPM is too dynamic to thrive in a situation where a hierarchy of authority must be navigated in order for valuable, time-sensitive decisions to be made.

9. Outsiders keep a low profile

Missionaries who have been involved in Church Planting Movements point to the importance of keeping a low personal profile as they seek to initiate and nurture the movement. A key concern is to minimize foreignness and encourage indigenes. Rather than waiting for new believers to prove themselves worthy of leadership, missionaries begin by drawing new believers into leadership roles through participative Bible studies and mentoring pastors from behind the scenes.

10. Missionaries suffer

Many missionaries who have been engaged in CPMs have suffered illness, ridicule and shame. In some instances, the suffering was due to their own self-destructive behavior; in other cases, it came at the hands of opponents. There is reason to believe the affliction comes as the cost of battling spiritual darkness (Revelation 12:12). Whatever the cause, the increased suffering of those missionaries who are involved in CPMs is certainly noteworthy. Missionaries intent on this cause of action will need to be on their guard, and will desperately need to watch, fight and pray.