

STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIPS: A CASE HISTORY

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“TOWARD COLLABORATIVE EVANGELIZATION”*

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BACKGROUND:

The case history paper is presented in two parts –

- Part One examines, in a general way, the multi-national, multi-agency Strategic Evangelism Partnership model as a vehicle for evangelism/church planting.
- Part Two examines evangelism/church planting in Outer Mongolia as a specific application of the Strategic Evangelism Partnership model.

CASE HISTORY: PART ONE

STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIPS AS AN EVANGELISM/CHURCH PLANTING MODEL

Since the earliest days of the Church, partnership has figured in the imagery of relationships between believers. The Apostle Paul was frequent in referring to his fellow-believers as “partners in the Gospel.”

Rooted in the notion that the Good News is defined by the nature of relationships between the followers of Jesus, partnership has ebbed and flowed as a theme of the life of the Church over the centuries.

With the advent of the “modern missionary movement,” daughter Churches began to emerge. It was natural that over the years there should develop a wide expression of what constituted partnership between the “mother” Church in the missionary sending country and the “daughter” Church in the missionary receiving country. Debates raged, policies underwent constant review and colonial and post-colonial contexts provided an ever-present challenge to what constituted a legitimate, healthy partnership between East/West and North/South sectors of the Church.

The explosion of the *non-Western* missionary movement of the 1960s onwards largely caught both denominational and interdenominational, missions agencies off guard. This was curious as the explosion was the prayed for “return on investment” of the last 150-200 years of the modern missionary movement. It should have been closely watched, well documented, and celebrated throughout the Church worldwide as a great testimony to the faithfulness of those who had gone before and to God’s relentless desire to draw men and women to Himself.

The hundreds of field ministries now involved in the Partnership Movement readily acknowledge that there are many legitimate forms of ministry Partnership – different circumstances calling for different types of Partnership.

KEY TRENDS DRIVING THE STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIP MOVEMENT

Since 1985 the growing Partnership Movement has been empowered by several key factors. Among them –

- Radically changed socio/political realities producing an unprecedented awareness of high perceived need, raising the number of people who are open to consideration of innovation and change.
- Sharply expanded communication and transportation capacity at greatly reduced cost.
- The demand for greater return on investment by stakeholders whether they be in business, political, or charitable entities.
- The decline in reliance on centralized authority, structures, and services in favor of more decentralized, flatter, direct, hands-on action modalities.
- The acknowledgement that outsourcing, partnerships and strategic alliances can make former competitors collaborators and that this perspective is now a norm in many social/business sectors.
- The outpouring of non-Western missionaries complementing those from the more traditional sending countries.
- The rapid rise in the number of specialized networks and annual regional evangelism consultations committed to evangelism and church planting.
- The increased initiative taken by local churches and a desire for “hands on,” relationally-intensive qualities in the projects where they make significant financial investments.

- The spectacular rise in the *number* of local churches seeking direct, durable involvement in international mission.

STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIPS: A HOLISTIC, MULTI-NATIONAL, MULTI-LATERAL MINISTRY PARADIGM

In 1986 the first evangelism/church planting Partnership was launched among eight diverse ministries working in North Africa. *From the outset, these Partnerships were perceived as rooted in the church and had as their objective a nationally led church planting movement.*

Since those early beginnings, the Strategic Evangelism Partnership Movement has grown rapidly in two parts.

Part One: Over 600 local church, denominational and interdenominational mission agencies, and other specialized ministries of the church from more than 55 countries are actively participating in 90 operational Strategic Evangelism/Church Planting Partnerships in as many people groups. Another 70+ Strategic Partnerships are in active development within the Movement.

Part Two: From West Africa to North and South Asia, leaders and participants from Partnerships that have natural interests in common have organized twenty regional evangelism consultations. These consultations allow the individual Partnership participants to discuss, coordinate, plan, and pray over issues that affect the wider region where their initiative is underway. (Note: see diagram at the end of this paper which provides a sense of how these two elements link with one another.)

Critical Partnership effectiveness principles that have emerged over the last twelve years have demonstrated their relevance in virtually any cultural context, Western or non-Western. This has allowed a Partnership Training Program to develop which provides 20+ courses per year in six languages, from introductory to more advanced and “in service” levels.

As the number of these types of Partnerships grew, they eventually became known as Strategic Evangelism/Church Planting Partnerships. Rising out of an extremely diverse global church and ministering in equally diverse situations, the Partnerships have naturally been varied but consistently have had five qualities. They are:

- **Intentional:** The result of conscious commitment on the part of diverse individuals and ministries, these partnerships call for one or more committed facilitators to help launch and sustain the cooperative effort.
- **International:** The global church and her ministry agencies are provided a forum in which East/West, North/South functional issues can be addressed in a climate of trust and open relationships. Critical to this has been *active participation by the national leadership of the emerging churches* in the Partnerships.
- **Inclusive:** Typified by open rather than closed organizational architecture, these Partnerships are hotbeds of ministry growth and innovation. An on-going, durable forum is provided for wide-ranging theological, traditional, and cultural diversity.
- **Informal:** These Partnerships focus on vision and outcomes rather than structures and theological statements. Typically they are consensus rather than constitutionally based.
- **Integrated:** An inclusive ministry vision encourages a holistic expression of witness. A typical Strategic Evangelism/Church Planting Partnership involves agricultural, health, community development, small business and educational components combined with more traditional forms of Scripture translation, media, personal witness, etc

LESSONS LEARNED/ISSUES RAISED

The history of the Church is replete with the stories of heroic individuals who, against all odds and with little apparent human support, engaged in evangelistic efforts which resulted in the launching of a thriving, sometimes lasting Church.

But, a pattern for effective *cooperative* evangelism/church development has been substantially lost in the modern missionary movement so heavily influenced by Western culture and its highly individualistic forms of lifestyle and witness.

BIBLICAL WITNESS IS COMMUNITY-BASED

In today's global context, there is new incentive to re-examine and acknowledge the Biblical truth that there are *two* primary forms of authentic witness; individual *and* *community*.

Due to the dominance of Western culture in recent history, individual witness has been seen as a primary paradigm while community witness has been largely neglected – as has community life and its implications for the local Church!

For the Partnership Movement the Gospel has emerged as Good News about restored relationships (Luke 10:25-28). Jesus established relational qualities in the Church as the *central* means the world could use to authenticate His ministry (John 17:20-23). And, the apostle Paul suggests our primary task is that of restoring relationships through Christ's power (II Corinthians 5:18-19).

EFFECTIVE CHURCH DEVELOPMENT IS ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIPS

As we reflect on effective Church development models, we might do well to study more closely the parenthetical passage which, in the middle of the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus instructs His disciples on the importance of understanding the role of relationships and partnership in evangelism.

In this passage, Jesus suggests at least two important aspects of evangelism/Church planting:

- First, that frequently if not most often, individuals coming into the Kingdom do so as part of a process. Evangelism is not an event. And, that process typically involves more than one person.
- Second, the results that we see *today* may well be the product of our work *and* someone else's faithfulness – someone we never knew, who was faithful before we were involved.

As Jesus suggests, there is a need to respect others' roles and respect God's work in history – even if we have no first hand, specific knowledge of how either figured into the results we are now seeing.

This observation is strongly supported by the apostle Paul's words to the Church in I Corinthians 3: 1-9. (In the *Good News* translation of this passage, Paul concludes, "There is no

difference between the man who sows and the man who waters. God will reward each one according to the work he has done. For we are *partners together* [emphasis added] working together for God ...”)

This understanding of God’s plan for evangelism and Church planting is rooted, of course, in our understanding of the very nature of God Himself. This is especially seen in the first eleven chapters of Genesis in which we meet God in the *plural*, the “us” of creation. God, dwelling *in community*, outside of time or the created order. It explains why, when He did create, God created “in His likeness” – that is, beings designed to live *in relationship*; with Himself, internally with themselves in a healthy self-awareness (which separates man from all the other created order), and with others (giving particular meaning to the Luke 10 passage regarding the Great Commandment).

THE MODERN WORLD: REALITY CALLS FOR A NEW LOOK AT INDIVIDUALISM AND WESTERN MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

In the diverse global world of the new millennium, the Church is once again needing to address the meaning and significance of these Biblical passages.

- First, initiatives in which one individual does everything is not only foreign to the true Biblical paradigm, it is a relic of a time in history when communications was poor, transportation slow, and resources extremely limited.
- Second, the failure of the Gospel to make significant headway in community-based, relationally-intensive Non-Western cultures (i.e. Islam, Hindu, Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist), raises serious questions about the power and credibility of our message when delivered individualistically. Even more so when the messengers appear to be divided.
- Third, the Strategic Evangelism Partnerships have demonstrated the *critical need for new, flexible models for cooperation which engage not only Western and Non-Western missionaries but that are inclusive of the emerging leadership* in a new, growing national church. In over 60% of the currently operating Partnerships, Non-Western missionaries and leaders of the new, emerging church in the country or language group play significant key roles in the facilitation and leadership teams.

As the experience has been gained primarily in the relationally-intensive, community-based cultures mentioned earlier, the truth of passages like Psalm 133 and John 17 have taken on even greater significance.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP IS TANGIBLE

A Partnership approach –

- Brings real credibility (John 17) to our message. We can actually *demonstrate* restored, trust-based relationships.
- It allows for the release of the Holy Spirit's power and refreshment for those involved in ministry -- frequently in the hardest places (Psalm 133).
- It welcomes each person as they employ their God-given gifts (I Corinthians 12). Well diggers, translation specialists, radio broadcasters, student evangelists, medical personnel, and many others can each have a conscious sense of being part of God's redemptive grace.
- Partnership for evangelism/Church planting acknowledges that none of us is sufficient in ourselves and demonstrates genuine humility in our call (John 4:34-38).
- This approach also acknowledges that God is the orchestrator of the harvest; that as we are faithful, He is faithful (Hebrew 11:35b-40). While we must "press toward the mark" we do not control the timetable, it is in His hands.

MAJOR BARRIERS TO A BIBLICAL APPROACH

Many barriers stand in the way of such a Partnership approach to ministry.

- Personal and organizational pride.
- Demand for short-term if not "instant" results.
- Expectations that leadership must be *initiated and maintained* by Westerners
- Majoring on minor theological differences while being unwilling to acknowledge agreement on the heart of the Gospel.
- Tradition, fear and unwillingness to consider new approaches – especially collaborative strategies that call for dependence on each other and to share success.
- Satan who uses division and discord based on individualism as a primary means of destroying the power and credibility of Jesus' life and message.
- Little practical experience of *how* to work together in durable multi-national, multi-lateral ministry partnerships.

To help the Church advance in these areas, intensive, practical training, good, long-term working models, and on-going coaching and mentoring is critically needed, rooted in our *collective* Biblical prayer and reflection.

**CASE HISTORY: PART TWO
OUTER MONGOLIA AS A STUDY OF THE STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR
EVANGELISM/CHURCH PLANTING**

As we seek to extend the reach of the Good News, individual conversions do not necessarily mean the launch of a viable, reproducing indigenously-led church. Similarly, “planting” a church does not necessarily mean the growth of the Church. A range of factors may inhibit individual believers becoming a church, or, a “planted” church becoming an indigenous church planting movement.

The cultural background, theology, ecclesiology, missiology, and personality of the evangelists/church planters can have a profound impact on the nature of the outcomes. Frequently evangelistic/church planting efforts are isolated, disconnected in nature and unable to encourage and support one another. Frequently expatriates find it difficult to release leadership and empower promising nationals as they grow in Christ and assume leadership. Then, security concerns, intense nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and the persecution of followers of Christ may also inhibit church growth.

In this context, the development of the Church in Outer Mongolia is an interesting case study.

MONGOLIA: BACKGROUND

The God of history and redemption has had the Mongolians in mind for a very long time. (Mongolians number 6-7 million and are spread over Inner Mongolia, a northern province of China, Outer Mongolia, an autonomous, sovereign nation, and in eastern Russia/Siberia.) In His grace in the 13th Century, He moved on the heart of Genghis Khan to ask the Roman Church for

missionaries to bring the message of Christ to his people. Rome failed to respond. Kenneth Latourette and Stephen Neill both document how just over a hundred years ago a large number of Christian missionaries were martyred seeking to take the Good News to the Mongolians. And, in more recent times during the 1970s-80s, a small group of 2-3 expatriate missionaries labored through great hardship to share Christ with the Mongolians in the dark Marxist days before Perestroika and Glasnost opened the country.

So, what has happened since 1991 has built on a history of God's grace for the Mongolian people and the severe investment of "invisible others" who have gone before us – reminding us of Jesus stern warning to His disciples in John 4:38.

MONGOLIA COLLABORATION: STRUCTURES

From 1989 – 1990, wide-ranging personal, one on one meetings were held with leaders of ministries committed to Mongolia. This led, in 1991 to a meeting in Hong Kong in which an evangelism/church-planting Partnership was launched in a meeting of over 70 individuals representing more than 20 mission societies from more than a ten countries. The launch of the Partnership followed many years of deep division among a number of key leaders committed to evangelism in the country. From 1991 to 1999, the partnership grew to over one hundred ministries from more than 20 nations.

From the beginning, the Partnership operated by consensus, had volunteer facilitators or facilitation team who helped keep the communications alive and the linkages functional. The Partnership has been holistic in its expression of evangelism – sharing Christ through education, medical and social services, literacy, broadcasting, Scripture translation/ publication, student ministry, language instruction, etc.

Out of the wider group of ministries grew JCS, Joint Christian Services, a smaller, constitutionally-based consortium of ministries that specifically addresses educational, social and other related issues through formal agreements with government agencies.

MONGOLIA COLLABORATION: PRIMARY OUTCOMES

At one of the Partnership's more recent annual review and planning meeting, over half of the 200 present were elders and pastors of the rapidly-growing Mongolian Church. This was in stark contrast to the 1991 launch of the Partnership in which there was one Mongolian believer! Equally striking was the fact that these Mongolian Church leaders were meeting with Christians in the partnership from the Church around the world. Even the Partnership's three co-facilitators, a Mongolian, Korean, and American, reflected that diversity. And, all meetings have been conducted in the Mongolia language.

After 1900 years without a church, in a scant decade –

- A diverse Church has been born with an estimated 30,000+ baptized believers and many more in attendance.
- Over 200 local fellowships function as the Church is distributed throughout the country and many more small fellowship groups are functioning.
- The Mongolian church leaders come from all walks of life and, rather than foreigners in dominant roles, Mongolians clearly are in the forefront of evangelism and the growth of the Church.
- Though diverse in denominational expression, the Mongolian Church has formed the Mongolian Evangelical Fellowship which facilitates prayer, communication, and coordination within the rapidly-growing national church.
- The Mongolian church has already identified, commissioned, and sent out missionaries to three surrounding ethnolinguistic groups.
- The Bible has been completed in the Mongolian language.
- Training programs exist for the emerging Mongolian church leadership.
- A television station with a “Christian worldview” has been built in the capital and broadcasts daily.
- A network of FM radio stations are being developed by the Mongolian church in cooperation with expatriates.

- A variety of educational, medical, and other national development initiatives are being undertaken jointly between Mongolian personnel and expatriates.

MONGOLIA: COLLABORATIVE OUTCOMES: PRIMARY FACTORS

- From the outset, those going into Mongolia to share Christ following the collapse of the old system knew they could not do it alone. Everyone knew that a range of Kingdom resources would be needed.
- It was understood that for those Kingdom resources to be effective, there had to be some type of communication and coordination of effort – therefore, the need for a Partnership was apparent.
- The Partnership kept its focus on spiritual outcomes (evangelism/ church-planting related activities) and has not spent much time on structure and form. At times this lack of structure was a weak point. But, on balance, it appears to have been a real strength.
- While the Partnership did not seek to create a single church of one particular tradition, the forum of the Partnership allowed the diverse evangelism/church-planting personnel to stay in touch, pray, and plan together.
- The Partnership mobilized a world wide prayer effort that, from the earliest days, has empowered those sharing the Good News and has strengthened the unity of the diverse evangelists/church-planters.
- The Partnership provided a means for the very diverse, widely-scattered evangelism /church-planting effort in the country to stay connected – providing not only functional linkages but encouragement and inter-personal support as well.
- The diversity of ministries empowered a range of initiatives in support of evangelism/church planting that no single agency could have undertaken.
- The emerging Mongolian Church, though quite diverse in its expression, has seen the evangelism/church-planting Partnership as a model for functional unity in diversity.
- As a result, a significant number of the Mongolian Church leadership meet and pray regularly. And, the Mongolians have now formed their own national Evangelical Fellowship – linking them with the worldwide Church and giving them formal representation with the government.

MONGOLIA: COLLABORATION: PROBLEMS/LESSONS

The Mongolia Partnership case study is one of intensive cross-cultural, wide-ranging theological diversity. Unlike evangelism/church planting initiatives undertaken in more restricted socio/political contexts, the “wide open” access to Mongolia by expatriate ministries added both opportunities and complexities. Among them have been:

- Continuity in leadership. The initial Partnership facilitator's assignment was changed by his mission within two years of his commitment to the role. Subsequent leadership has been provided by a small 2-4 person facilitation team usually made up of expatriates, Non-Western missionaries, and Mongolian nationals. Rotation of expatriates in/out of the country has been a problem.
- After 2000 years of spiritual darkness, it should not be surprising that Satan has actively sought to "defend his territory" through his traditional "divide and conquer" technique. Just as deep divisions among Christian workers interested in Mongolia were uncovered in the exploration phase, so the Partnership has required pro-active work on relationships with on-going reconciliation, communication, and building of trust.
- The rapid growth of the national church and the emergence of strong Mongolian leadership was a challenge for some expatriates who were unprepared for spiritual "success" so quickly. In earlier days, the "spiritual maturity" question regarding Mongolian leadership created diverse, often intense views on what role Mongolians should play either within the Partnership or, in some case, in local church leadership.
- Mongolia is a classic case in which Scripture translation became a polarizing issue primarily among expatriates as to the choice of key words (names of God, etc.) that were culturally relevant yet true to the Biblical meaning. Divisions on these issues affected relations within the expatriate community, drew in the Mongolians, and had an impact on the Partnership.
- As the emerging Mongolian church formed itself into the Mongolian Evangelical Fellowship, the Mongolians and expatriates were unsure as to that role the Partnership should continue to play. This desired development in the Mongolian church revealed another challenge when there is heavy, diverse involvement by the global church in a major evangelism/church planting effort; namely --
 1. What are the likely longer-term roles of the international Christian community to be?
 2. What should be done with emerging national church leadership to engage in a healthy, prayer-based dialogue for such planning?

STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIPS: LOOKING FORWARD

THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MOVEMENT

- Resources for training and on-going coaching must be expanded to meet the growing demand. Some of this may be met through "distance education" (WWW, CD Rom, Programmed Instruction, etc.) but the real issue will be training effective, credible trainers and providing their on-going encouragement and resourcing.
- More thought is needed within the wider movement to the "life cycle" of such partnerships. What are the appropriate roles for the expatriates and emerging national leaders as the national church comes alive and takes on the church planting vision? What types of "partnership" will always be needed, what are the indicators of key transition stages in the life of the partnership?

- The growing regional evangelism consultations (now numbering 20 from West Africa to Asia), regional evangelism/church planting networks, and other national/regional specialized and general Church networks need to be pro-actively engaged in strategic roles and ownership of the movement.
- Greater coordination will be needed to experience the full potential of involvement by other international, specialized partnerships dealing with a range of subjects such as Oral Communication, Bible translation/distribution, evangelism in/through such sectors as Youth at Risk, Media, and Sports.

THE MONGOLIA STRATEGIC EVANGELISM PARTNERSHIP

- The long-term objectives and respective roles for expatriates and the national Church working in partnership must receive further attention.
- The model the Partnership has provided needs to be considered by the Mongolian church as it looks to send its own missionaries. Encouraging signs of this have been seen in dialogue with expatriates/Mongolian nationals regarding national missionaries already sent to three neighboring areas.
- The international cooperative effort may call for a more intentional, on-going partnership awareness/education/orientation especially for new expatriate missionaries entering the country. The size and diversity of the growing Christian community in Mongolia naturally means that a limited number have had any real, working experience in a Partnership's development and on-going service.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES

Two, naturally-linked levels of cooperation for evangelism, church planting, and development of national church planting movements

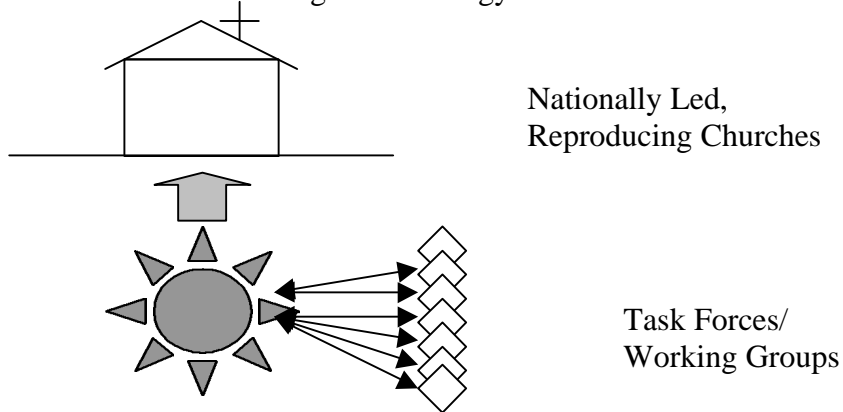
PART 1

STRATEGIC EVANGELISM/CHURCH PLANTING PARTNERSHIPS

20—100 Diverse Evangelism Ministries
Working Together

To Establish A Nationally-Led, Church Planting Movement in a Specific Unreached Language Group

Each Partnership has 4—15 Task Forces
Addressing Specific Elements of The Overall Evangelism Strategy

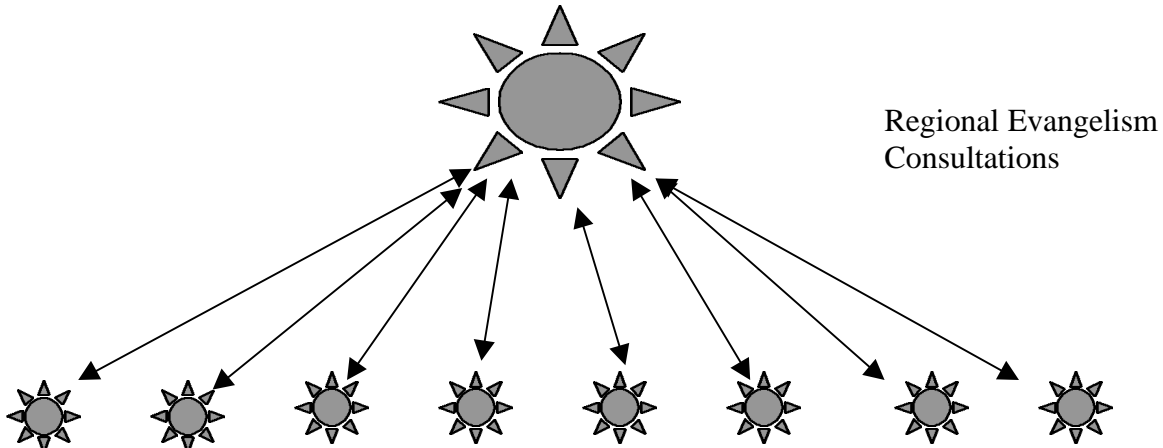


Note: Currently 90 of these Strategic Evangelism/Church Planting Partnerships are operational among as many people groups

PART 2

REGIONAL EVANGELISM CONSULTATIONS

Leaders of 6-20 Partnerships Coming Together Annually To Plan, Pray, Coordinate Most Effective Evangelism In The Region



People group, city, or country specific Strategic Evangelism/Church Planting Partnerships

Note: Currently 20 of these Regional Evangelism Consultations from West Africa to North and South Asia link leaders and participants of Partnerships in their region.