

Mission to North America
Issues in Recruiting Church Planters for the Hispanic American Context
September 2008

I. CHURCH PLANTER

A. CALLING

1. Not all ordained men who speak Spanish have the call, competencies, and character to be a church planter in the US. (Not all North American men have it all either!) All too many churches are willing to overlook this fact if they even discover it.
2. Not all men who state they are called to plant churches in the United States are doing so out of a sense of divine “missionary” calling.
 - o The lure of the “promised land”
 - o The needs and desires of family and friends
 - o The deteriorating context where they are located outside the United States

B. LANGUAGE PROFILE of the church planter

a. Lack of Spanish proficiency

- i. Church planter’s ministry even to 2nd and 3rd generation inevitably encounters 1st generation **Spanish speakers in the extended network**.
- ii. In ministry to Hispanics in a primarily English speaking church (even Anglo), church planters / pastors encounter proficient English speakers who strongly prefer to be ministered to in their **heart language** for counseling, serious Bible study, prayer, and pastoral care that requires the expression of deep emotion. This is even true of educated professionals who wish to have their needs met in Spanish without appearing marginalized or otherwise embarrassed.

b. Lack of English proficiency

- i. A church planter who lacks English is immediately **handicapped in ministry to the children** of his first generation constituency and in conserving them for the church. These children will prefer to be disciplined in English as soon as they attain English literacy (usually after 9 months) of public school.

- ii. A church planter who lacks English will experience **difficulty accessing North American culture**, especially in areas that are not predominantly Hispanic.
 - iii. A church planter who does not know English and who does not learn English will have **difficulty maintaining his leadership** over a group who are progressively evolving culturally and linguistically.
- c. Inflexibility on the part of presbyteries to examine and admit candidates who are not proficient in English.

Suggestions re: Language:

1. If a church planter is planting primarily in English, it would be ideal for him to know Spanish as well. If this is not possible, he must surround himself with bilingual people and intentionally train and delegate the care of Spanish proficient people to them.
2. When ministering to Hispanics in an English proficient context it is still appropriate and desirable to use the Spanish language for informal conversation, counseling, Bible study, and even in readings, prayers and choruses in an English speaking worship service.
3. When translating the sermon from English to Spanish pay very close attention to the sensibilities and desires of the people. The various methodologies utilized, e.g., earphones, translate yourself, another translating you alternately, or written manuscript, depend upon the region, and on educational and economic levels. Also pay attention to frequency of bilingual services if that is the methodology selected.
4. When ministering among the first generation it is essential to provide English ministries to the children and youth virtually from day one. If the church planter doesn't speak English, he must train and delegate this ministry to trustworthy people. A model of ministry must be selected that fits the gifts and comfort of the church planter as well as the context.

C. CULTURAL PROFILE of the church planter

Cultural I.Q. for (1) Latin culture, (2) Dynamic Hispanic Culture of evolving, more assimilating, probably creating new versions of postmodern culture, and (3) Mainstream Culture is an issue

- a. Does the church planter understand the aspirations, desires, and relationship to **traditional Latin culture** of his constituents?

- b. Does the church planter understand the cultural dynamics of the **second generation** or even of 1st generation young people who are evolving, embracing postmodern and mainstream features while retaining high affinity with many comfortable aspects of the traditional Latin culture?
- c. Does the church planter understand the subtleties of enjoying Latin culture while moving comfortably and strategically in a **global** (or one world culture)?
- d. Does the church planter understand the intensity of the Latin's desire to be **accepted by gringos**? Sorry to say this as a medio-gringo, but cases such as La Muralla Insensata and Elian bring this to the surface.
- e. Does the church planter know how to shepherd a **relationship of groups** of Hispanics with differing cultural affinities and goals?
- f. Is the church planter willing / capable of ministering **contextually within his target group(s)**?

Suggestions on Cultural Profile:

1. The church planter must study his cultural context and the desires, aspirations and cultural directions of his people. He must get in front and lead them not just spiritually but culturally. If he does not he will lose their respect.
2. Training should be provided to church planters regarding "generic" Latin cultural characteristics and their relevance to ministry style. It should not be assumed that he knows this because he is Latin any more than we assume Anglos know it because they are Anglo. This training should include material on emerging Latin cultures that are embracing postmodernism.
3. This cultural training should be provided to established churches who are desirous of ministering among Hispanics.
4. Cultural training should include the sociological dynamics of Anglo and Latin cultures juxtaposed, as well as Latin cultures (including generational differences) that live beside each other in the same church.

D. THEOLOGICAL AND EDUCATION ISSUES

- a. Disparity between educational levels and requirements between PCA and Latin America. Most Hispanic male immigrants don't have Bachelor's degree, and aren't eligible to go into M.Div. program. Many have only High School, if that.

- i. Sometimes **motivation** is low on the part of the church planter. Most can't take time from work to university or seminary and don't have the money to.
 - ii. Often **Anglo expectations** are inflexible.
 - iii. High motivation is required for the **PCA to change** direction and implement new strategies.
- b. Biblical Theological Contextualization that allows the gospel to address specific aspirations, needs, and sins of the Hispanic is an issue.
 - i. Liberation theology in light of the re-emerging popularity of Che Guevara and to the influence of Hugo Chávez (and to a lesser extent Morales, Uribe and Calderón).
 - ii. Family structure, mysticism, Mariology, machismo, idealism vs. realism, errors of Roman Catholicism, etc.
What is a contextual gospel for Hispanic Americans?
- c. Few PCA churches recognize that not all ordained "Presbyterian" men from outside the US and the PCA are compatible with the theological and ecclesiastical beliefs of the PCA.
 - Usually unfamiliar with Covenant Theology and are evangelically "dispensational" and "baptistic"
 - Usually do not believe in infant baptism
 - Usually have no concept of our version of Presbyterianism that is "grass roots" and are much more inclined towards hierarchical ecclesiology.
 - Most cultures are very out of phase with Phil Douglass' personality definition of the PCA.
 - Many of the Hispanic men who are attracted to the PCA personality and culture are not adequately aligned with those from their own Hispanic culture here in the US.

Suggestions on Theological Issues:

1. Pray
2. Identify
3. Find in context
4. Train in context
5. TE is the key for training

6. One is enough – get started
7. Utilize whatever methodology is available – MINTS, FLET, LAMP, personal tutoring.
8. Educate PCA TE. Must challenge them. More show they are willing to mentor.

II. CALLING ENTITY – CHURCH, PRESBYTERY, OR NETWORK

A. FINANCES

1. Few churches recognize the costs involved in bringing a man and his family into the United States from outside the country
 - a. Legal costs for visas
 - b. Outfitting costs (car, house, furnishings, school for kids, etc.)
 - c. “Culture Shock” that inevitably hits as inaccessibility to the familiar, family, and friends begins to set in.
 - d. Trips “home” usually cost handsomely. MTW does not want its missionaries returning home in the first term.
 - e. The fact that few Hispanic pastors outside the United States are fully supported financially.
2. Few US churches understand the different view of “job security” that most Hispanic men have and the impact that our PCA “system” has on them:
 - a. Few Hispanic churches fully support their pastors. Most US churches want to pay Hispanic pastors based on what non-Hispanic pastors are paid in that presbytery.
 - b. There are some ordained Hispanic men in the PCA who are constantly floating around looking for a “job” that will take care of them and their families for the next couple of years before their unproductiveness is revealed and they are asked to move on. Few churches call and investigate why this man is available to them.
3. PCA churches are accustomed to the relative rapid planting of self-supporting churches and become frustrated with the often slower pace of Hispanic church planting. They may put unwarranted pressure on a Hispanic man to produce.
4. Understanding the economic realities of Hispanic Immigrants
 - i. Supporting family members in **home countries**. The #2 source of GNP for Cuba and Mexico is dollars sent from family members living in the U.S.
 - ii. **Low wage** and income levels of the new immigrants

- iii. **Lack of stewardship** training, sense of community, or corporate generosity.
- iv. **Lack of a network** from which church planters can raise funds.
- v. The lack of understanding that on the part of the church planter that **investment in him suggests a return.**

Suggestions for Finances:

- a. The church planter should know well the realities of the financial situation he is getting into.
- b. The church planter should be expected to be mature in practicing Biblical stewardship.
- c. Fundraising strategies must include advocacy. Anglos must help, open doors, and represent their Latin brothers.
- d. Financial stewardship must be part of the church planter's discipleship program. The poor are not excluded from participation.
- e. Longer term strategies are appropriate for Latin church planters. Anglo contributors must be educated as to the "why."
- f. The two (2) arm model as practiced by Al Guerra should be considered at least initially. In this model the Anglo host houses a Latin "church" or "congregation," cutting down but not eliminating administrative costs for Latin church planters.
- g. A real viable strategy for addressing the financial issue is to target 1st and 2nd generation adults simultaneously effectively planting two (2) congregations from day one, in a one (1) church model. The tithes go to one budget. Typically the giving will be higher in the English speaking congregation at first, but the Spanish speaking congregation tends to catch up.
- h. PATIENCE
Don't worry if things are really slow at first.
- i. Bivocational. Some PCA church planters are practicing this model effectively. Even if a first generation church is healthy, it may be necessary for the church planter to be bivocational for years or indefinitely. PCA authorities need to be educated that this is just fine, even Biblical.

- j. Another financial strategy that has been practiced effectively by some denominations is “remuneration for tasks accomplished.” The church planter instead of receiving a salary is remunerated for specific tasks: # of visits, number of presentations of gospel, number of outreach events, etc.

B. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

1. Most North Americans do not recognize the very distinct cultural differences that exist between different Hispanic nationalities. Mismatching a church planter and a predominant Hispanic people group can be disastrous.
 - a. The closer two nations are located together geographically, the more they dislike each other (The Samaritan factor?)
 - b. Whereas most churches would never hire a man from the countryside of Southern Alabama to plant an urban church in a major big city, they will quickly do so in hiring a Hispanic man without a thorough enough investigation.

There is a part of Mexico that is not considered “Mexican” even though it is included inside their country!

C. MINISTRY MODELS

1. PCA churches tend to think in terms of one “model” only of church planting rather than considering other functional models. Some church planters are uncomfortable with some models. They need to consider the factors listed under part III “Site” below in deciding on their model.
2. Keep the models before the planters and local churches
3. No one model is the right one. It depends upon context, culture, calling, and giftedness of the planter and his people.
4. Educate through seminars at local churches, conferences, website, books (write one), colleges, seminary, and seminars at General Assembly.
5. Create your own model.

Encourage church planter to create.

D. PARADIGM SHIFTS

The calling entity may need to consider some paradigm shifts:

1. From a professional model to a lay-led model (Acts 8:1-4)
2. From a professional model to a ruling elder planter model

3. From a time money driven model to an organic model
4. From a regional model to a people group target model
5. Benefits and comments:
The lay or elder led plant costs almost nothing. The biggest benefit is that the lay person lives in a community, knows the community, and has a heart for a specific people group in the community. The church plant can start as a glorified hospitality driven Bible study. This paradigm eliminates timelines and money issues. It allows for Biblical sowing and reaping which typically occurs over a 7 to 20 year period. It eliminates dependence on a professional (“let the cleric do it”). It allows for “the anointed” who has a fulltime job to dedicate his ministry time to prayer and the Word, and requires the others to step up to do the administrative work and the work of ministry. This totally changes the dynamic from that of the people trying to keep up with a sprinting professional. It changes it to a Biblical discipleship model where a growing community of small believers is reaching out relationally to the people group for which they have a burden. The Redeemer model of throwing hundreds of thousands of dollars at an ethnic plant may or may not work. If it does work, it is not transferable as a model.

E. NEED TO GROW OUR OWN CHURCH PLANTERS BECAUSE OF SMALL POOL OF QUALIFIED MEN

1. There is a very small pool of qualified men for Hispanic church planting in the US. The best route is to “grow our own” from within existing Hispanic works and from within our existing “Anglo” congregations via the use of LAMP and LAMP-Spanish.

Suggestions:

1. Pray
2. The candidate will come to your local church. The PCA TE must be alerted to this and “watch.”
3. Intentionally evangelize. We will lead these church planters to Christ.
4. Train just one (1).
5. Network broadly across denominational lines. Go to drug rehab ministries, or prayer conferences. Charismatics make great candidates. They like to pray and no one teaches them. They are hungry.
6. Keep training year after year.

III. SITE

The church planter and sending entity need to consider these factors in selecting their site and deciding on their ministry model:

- a. The demographics of the Hispanic population.
- b. The capabilities of their church planting team and church planter
- c. The attitude of the sponsoring congregation(s) towards
 - i. The long-term costs of each model
 - ii. The purpose and goals of doing Hispanic ministry
- d. The ethnographic information of the Hispanic community
 - What makes them tick?
 - Why are they there?
 - Education level, what do they hope to accomplish?
 - What is their relation with their home country?
 - How much money? Free time?
 - How do they live?
 - What are churches and ministries currently doing to reach them?
 - What communication media reach them?
 - What are their: Hopes, aspirations, fears, problems, schools, crimes, pleasures, contextualized profiles, transportation, housing, world view, security, religious life, beliefs, doubts, questions, reasons for immigrating?
 - You can learn so much about them – what their goals for being here are, how long want to stay, relationship w/ home country and this country – political and economic.