

Sustaining Healthy Churches in Movements: Leveraging the Five Roles of Ephesians 4 for Multiplying Leaders in CPMs

By Todd Lafferty

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The subject of Church-Planting Movements (CPMs) has proven to be polarizing among missiologists and church planters over the past 25 years. Some embrace CPM strategies, while others hold a more critical assessment. This polarization is especially true in Asia, where many CPMs have been reported and where we served for 27 years.

Unfortunately, critics and proponents have drawn up sides in this debate, resulting in an untold number of journal articles and books advocating for one approach or the other, and even attacking the other. Even worse, the polarization has brought division between colleagues on the field.

One question raised in this conversation relates to long-term health and leadership training in CPMs. Is it possible to train pastors and teachers within movements in such a way that the number of leaders keeps pace with the multiplication of churches? If churches begin

multiplying, how might the missionary find ways to strengthen movement health without slowing the movement of people coming to faith and churches being formed?

Not a New Debate

It is good to remember this is no recent area of disagreement in the mission community. In the 1890s, a disagreement arose among the missionaries in Uttar Pradesh (UP), India, regarding whether to slow a movement down to adequately teach all those who had been baptized or continue to facilitate the growth of the movements (Stock and Stock 1975). As the UP Mission struggled over this issue as it developed strategy, Robert Stewart argued:

some express the conviction that they ought not to baptize any more applicants for baptism than they are able to afterwards train properly or care for—in other words, keep Christ's lambs out of the fold until that fold is enlarged and put in order, so that every member of the flock can be systematically fed and nicely housed—as if these lambs would not do better in the church than in the world anyhow, however imperfect the former might be, or as if the Lord would make a mistake in regenerating people too fast and would not, in His providence and by His grace, make abundant provision for the spiritual nourishment and the highest welfare of all His new-born children. (Stewart 1896)

Fred Stock, in his book *People Movements in the Punjab*, asserts that “quantity, rather than reducing quality, was used by God’s Spirit to create a vital growing fellowship so essential to spiritual depth” (Stock and Stock 1975). He affirms that God is definitely interested in numerical growth and that “we are called not just to be faithful, but to win people” (ibid.). The goal, according to Stock, should be both quality and quantity. He argues that “God is not content with a few highly polished ‘quality’ Christians, but opens His arms to gather in all who will come” (Obrien 2012).

My Personal Interest in the Topic

Throughout our ministry in Pakistan, I served as the pastor of the International Church of Karachi and as an evangelist among Muslims. We only saw a few Muslims come to faith in Christ during that time, but we made progress with a small house-church plant in the city. In our final two years in Karachi, my secondary role transitioned to IMB Strategy Coordinator, with the goal of planting churches among every people group in the city of Karachi. In that role, we mobilized, trained, and partnered with local believers and missionaries in Karachi to plant churches among Muslims from various people groups.

During the late 1990s, missionaries working in East Asia and South Asia developed strategies based on *Garrison's Ten Universals of CPMs* (Garrison 2004). Leaders and missionaries with the IMB working in areas that were experiencing CPMs introduced those new strategies throughout the IMB in trainings and workshops. Leaders expressed the expectation that field workers should experience CPMs within a couple of years of implementing the new strategies.

Although we implemented CPM strategies in Karachi, we did not experience a CPM in our work. Despite the fact that movements did not emerge wherever CPM methodologies were implemented, leaders considered CPM strategies the best way to initiate movements (ibid.). The IMB home office and field-based leadership held that if one implemented methodologies that led to CPMs in some places, then the implementation of those methods in other places would likely lead to CPMs.

After serving in Karachi for eight years, I transitioned to the IMB home office. While serving there, I interacted with field leaders from around the world and continued to hear stories of CPMs that were emerging in East Asia and Cuba. No CPMs had yet been reported among Muslim people groups.

Three years later, in 2003, we transitioned back to the field, this time as an IMB field leader (Strategy Associate) for the Muslim work

in Southeast Asia. The large movement in Asia led by Ying and Grace Kai continually received attention as a rapidly growing CPM, but other movements also began to emerge (Smith and Kai 2011; Watson 2008; Greeson 2010). Our leadership team, working among Muslims in Southeast Asia, started praying for similar breakthroughs.

Shortly after attending Strategy Coordinator training in Indonesia, an IMB seminary professor serving in Indonesia started working among an unengaged, unreached people group on the island of Java. Through the efforts of his team, 150 Muslims came to faith in Christ within the first six months of starting that work (Shipman 2015). As the movement of new believers continued to grow, several missionaries in Indonesia met to discuss how to move forward with planting reproducing churches and develop a training package for new believers and emerging leaders that could be used among all Muslims in Southeast Asia when they started coming to faith in Christ.

In July 2009, after being appointed to lead the Affinity of South Asian Peoples, I selected a leadership team and together we developed an overall strategy to begin reaching the 598 unengaged, unreached people groups, 345 of which were over one hundred thousand in population (International Mission Board 2010). In eight years, over three hundred unengaged, unreached people groups were engaged with the gospel, and several CPMs emerged among unreached people groups in South Asia as a result of implementing our overall strategy plan (International Mission Board 2016).

The rest of this article outlines the contours of this simple strategy plan, easily drawn on a piece of paper, which provided field leaders with a tool to evaluate strategy plans developed by new team leaders. When a God-ordained movement begins among a people group, we must do all we can to keep pace with how the Lord is moving among formerly lost peoples. One important aspect is to make certain that leaders are being trained within emerging churches. To do that, we must tap into the gifts and roles given to the church that the apostle Paul clearly articulates in Eph. 4:11–13.

The Five Roles (Eph. 4:11)

Several scholars affirm the ongoing role of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in our day. A body of literature has emerged in recent years advocating a focus on the *fivefold* gift mix of Eph. 4:11. Some call it APEST (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher), and others the “fivefold” ministry, or “5Q.” For the purposes of this article, *five roles* will be used. All five gifts need to be present in both local churches and church-planting teams, especially once a CPM emerges among a people group.

In *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions*, missiologist-practitioner Don Dent focuses on God’s ongoing gift of the apostle in the initial stages of church planting as the initiator for spreading the gospel and planting multiple reproducing churches among unreached people groups (Dent 2019). However, the apostolically-gifted worker desiring to see sustainable churches within an emerging CPM must focus on developing a team of missionaries with other gifts to nurture the young churches within movements. For example, missionaries with giftings such as shepherding and teaching are needed to train local pastors and teachers to lead the new churches.

As a CPM grows, the number of pastors and teachers must also grow to keep pace with the churches being planted. In South Asia, we recognized that we needed a new role to solve the church leadership development problem.

Movement-Strengthening Strategist

In 2009, we were seeing many movements emerging among Hindu peoples, but only limited attention was being given to training pastors and teachers. As a result, churches did not continue to multiply, and movements were not sustained over time. More attention needed to be directed toward the equipping role (Eph. 4:12), so that those gifted as pastors and teachers would multiply others in the movement with those gifts.

To address this problem, the Movement-Strengthening Strategist (MSS) role was created. The core aspect of the MSS role is to equip pastors and teachers within movements of multiplying disciples and churches. Sometimes the MSS ensured that training was passed on from generation to generation by the pastors and teachers who received training, who in turn trained the next generation of leaders, and so on. At other times, the MSS found that they needed to train pastors and teachers down through the generations of churches themselves. Often, the MSSs mentored national partners gifted in shepherding and teaching into these MSS roles. Many national MSSs have been empowered to do this work across South Asia by IMB leaders.

One concrete example is a South Asian missionary who has taken leadership training materials for pastors and teachers and distributed it out across nine networks of multiplying churches. Each of those networks now have national MSSs that have been developed. This year, those MSSs jointly held the first “North India MSS Team” meeting, led by two mature Indian leaders, where they crosspollinated across their networks and discussed key issues. Those nine networks are training more than two thousand pastors annually, not including the pastors and teachers who are repeating this teaching and training by those MSSs.¹

The Movement-Strengthening Strategist must have a mindset of urgency in order to multiply the training of pastors and teachers who serve as elders in the emerging churches. Elders must be appointed and trained at the same pace new churches are multiplying within the movement, such that the health and sustainability of the churches are more likely to be maintained. Through all five roles working in concert, a movement of healthy churches is more likely to be sustained over time.

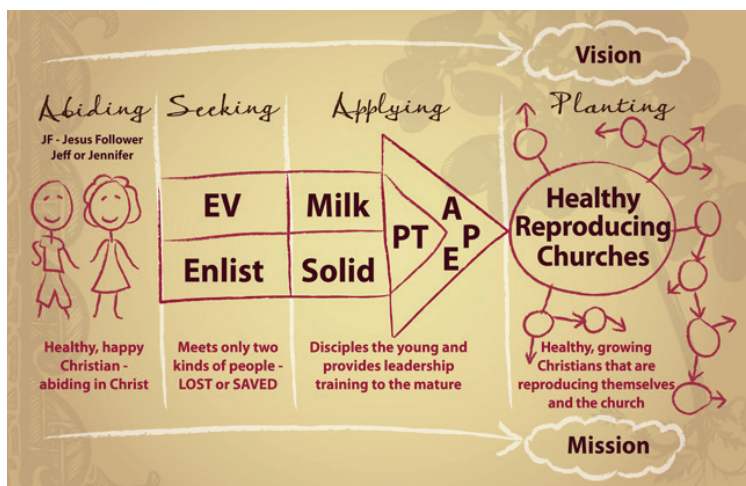
1 J.H., email correspondence with author, April 21, 2022. J.H. has served over fifteen years in South Asia and currently serves as an IMB Cluster Leader in South Asia.

The Five Roles in CPMs

The five roles in Eph. 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor/shepherd, and teacher) need to be examined more closely to determine the part they play in the growth and health of churches and the CPMs in which they are involved. In order to keep this in the forefront of our thinking, we developed a simple strategy that took into account all five roles, easily drawn on a piece of paper. This diagram provided field leaders with a tool to evaluate strategy plans developed by new team leaders.

The plan, known as the ASAP (Abiding, Seeking, Applying, and Planting) Plan, included Eph. 4:11 in the diagram, affirming the need to identify and develop people in every church and movement around the five roles found in the verse: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

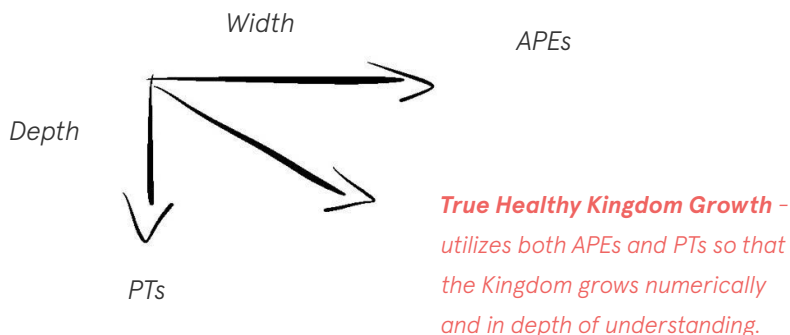
ASAP Strategy Plan—Abiding, Seeking, Applying, Planting!



Through our work in the field, we found that apostles, prophets, and evangelists (APEs) keep pushing the movement further and wider while pastors and teachers (PTs) continue to deepen the health of the churches within the movement (Roderick 2019). The key is getting buy-in from expat and national workers with all five giftings with the goal of

holding both perspectives in tension so that one does not overpower the other. What do those five roles look like on the field serving in concert with one another? (Wilson and Houk 2017)

Kingdom Growth



The Role of the Apostle

The function of modern-day apostles is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others. Modern-day apostles are not to be equated with “the Twelve” but are closer to what many Christians refer to as pioneer church planters or church-planting missionaries. Hirsch describes the apostle as the architect. The biblical word is “master builder” (Greek *archetekton* in 1 Cor. 3:10; Hirsch and Catchim 2012). *Arche* refers to origin or first and *tekon* refers to a craftsman or someone who plans out a design.

Architects in the first century not only designed the building but directed the process of construction. Jens Kaldeway asserts that if there is no apostle involved in the work, the building supplies will not be utilized since no one else will initiate the work and oversee the church-planting efforts (Kaldeway 2007). A “master builder,” or modern-day apostle, refers to a hands-on leader directing the process of planting new churches in a city, region, or people-group cluster.

In the midst of a CPM, the “master builder” keeps the breadth and depth of the church-planting task in view. The “master builder” knows

that new believers need to be disciplined and leaders need to be trained; they know where the work needs to move forward into new territory. These apostles pay attention to the overall health of the churches that are emerging in CPMs. They know when to focus on the work among people groups where disciples and churches are already multiplying and when to expand toward new pioneering efforts among new people groups.

The Role of the Prophet

What is the role of the modern-day prophet in the midst of a CPM? In no way should we affirm a modern-day prophet speaking a word from the Lord at the same level of inspiration as an Old Testament prophet (Stott 1979). This gift provides encouragement in the churches being planted, especially in areas of intense opposition. Although the work of the prophet is primarily to encourage believers (1 Cor. 14:22), Paul also explains that God can reveal the secrets of the heart of an unbeliever to a prophet, which results in that person turning and following Christ (1 Cor. 14:24–25).

The role of the prophet within a CPM might serve multiple purposes. As new disciples are made from people who come to Christ from non-Christian backgrounds, they may need someone who can speak truth to them regarding their old way of life. For example, someone might be hanging on to an idol in their home that ought to be cast out. The gap between the mature man of God as mentioned in Eph. 4:13 and the childish believer who is tossed back and forth by the waves in Eph. 4:14 can be pointed out by a prophet. In so doing, the prophet helps new believers and churches grow and mature so that they, in turn, can make disciples in their community and beyond.

The Role of the Evangelist

Even though all Christians are enjoined to share the gospel, there is a special gift endowed upon some in the area of evangelism. It may be expressed in several different ways such as being a gifted evangelistic

preacher, explaining the gospel clearly to unbelievers, helping timorous people place their faith in Christ, or engaging in personal evangelism in an effective way (Stott 1979).

Evangelists are not limited to itinerant preaching. Many are working within established congregations. Paul served as an evangelist and encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:5). In addition to personally proclaiming the gospel, evangelists equip others to share their faith so that they might grow in the Lord and in turn share the gospel with lost people (Eph. 4:12). The work of the evangelist covers a wide range of activities such as primary evangelism, planting churches, and training Christians to share their faith. Sustained evangelistic outreach is a characteristic of CPMs.

The Role of the Pastor/Shepherd

The term pastor is rare in the New Testament. In fact, Eph. 4:11 is the only place *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) is used to describe the work of a church leader. Thielman states that “in Eph. 4:11 the pastors were probably leaders within the Christian communities who held positions of authority and were charged with the community’s well-being” (2010, 276).

The model for the shepherding role is Jesus the Good Shepherd (John 10:1–18). Some characteristics of shepherding that Jesus displayed are (1) knowing people personally and intimately (John 10:3, 14), (2) leading them well (John 10:4), (3) protecting them from thieves, robbers, and wolves (John 10:7–13), and (4) loving them so much that one would sacrifice their life for them, unlike the hired hand who runs away when trouble comes (John 10:11–13, 15).

In the midst of a CPM, it is vital to have shepherds caring for the many new sheep who are entering the kingdom. The outside missionary should shepherd the shepherds, not the sheep. Otherwise, the movement may grow dependent on outsiders and thus cripple the long-term health of the emerging churches. The Movement-Strengthening Strategist raises up and equips local shepherds to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

The Role of the Teacher

By the time Jesus was born, the role of the teaching Rabbi was well established in Jewish life and culture (Hirsch 2017). There seems to have been a group who specialized in teaching (1 Thess. 5:12; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 12:28–29; Rom. 12:7; Acts 13:1; James 3:1), who instructed the church in “the teaching” (1 Tim. 6:1). “The teaching” refers to the message, including the doctrine, that the church received as instruction (Thielman 2010). Paul points out the problem of false teaching in Eph. 4:14 and makes it clear that teachers play a key role to help mature the body of Christ.

As the churches in Asia Minor continued to reach many Gentiles with the gospel, the need for the multiplication of teachers continued to be great (Schnabel 2012). The Gentiles did not have the foundation of the Old Testament that the Jewish believers had, so the need to multiply teachers to provide ample training for the Gentiles continued to be critical. Furthermore, the teachers exhorted hearers to live out the teaching in their lives (Arnold 2010).

In the same way, the role of the teacher is crucial in a CPM among an unreached people group who have little to no previous exposure to the gospel. Transmission of biblical teaching and training must be instilled in the first generation, then passed on to the next. Therefore, the teaching function must take into account the prevailing way a people group thinks on various issues and be able to pass on a biblical worldview. In order to incorporate this type of training at the grassroots level, elders must be chosen to lead the churches.

Multiplying Pastors/Shepherds and Teachers in CPMs

Choosing elders with the gifts of pastoring and teaching is one of the most important decisions for local churches. The members of the local church, often in consultation with the church planter, need to choose who will teach and shepherd the local church. In Acts, elders are

chosen to lead those new churches after a period has elapsed and their character is known. When Paul and Barnabas returned several months later to those churches that they had planted, they appointed elders to equip the church for the work of the ministry (Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11–12).

Appointing elders helped churches continue to grow in a healthy manner. The apostolic team knew the importance of choosing local leaders recognized by the congregation. Paul modeled how to appoint elders by praying and fasting with the local body during this process (Acts 14:23). Paul sent Titus to Crete to appoint elders in all the churches on that island because he had not appointed elders during his visit there (Titus 1:5).

Extra-biblical Requirements for Leaders in Movements

Due to long-held traditions, leaders from established churches often lay extra-biblical requirements on leaders of newly established churches among unreached people groups. New believers and leaders are often tempted to compare themselves to those long-established churches that have buildings, programs, and budgets. In South Asia, spoken and unspoken assumptions of what is required to be a leader of a church often do not follow biblical requirements.

Several extra-biblical requirements identified by field practitioners need to be considered when planting churches. Some of these requirements include formal educational requirements, building requirements, and receiving ordination to serve as a pastor. While the motivation may be to safeguard the church so that it becomes a healthy church, such requirements are extra-biblical and may tend to impede the growth of the newly planted churches.

Biblical Role and Characteristics of Elders

Paul describes several character qualities elders are expected to exhibit or avoid in 1 Tim. 3:1–7. Shepherding is another characteristic of elders (Matt. 9:37–11:1; John 21:15–17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2–3).

Leadership qualities should be evident in the elders chosen to lead the churches; terms used to describe elders are overseers (1 Tim. 3:1), stewards (Luke 12:42), and leaders with authority to lead (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Preaching and teaching is another characteristic that ought to be evident in the ministry of the elder (1 Tim. 3:2).

The five roles ought to be represented on the leadership team in churches (Eph. 4:11), and this includes the elders. In CPMs, churches need to have such leaders so that they continue to grow in a healthy manner and focus on reaching lost people. The apostles, prophets, and evangelists (APEs) will likely engage in an itinerant ministry, and the pastors and teachers (PTs) will be more localized in their work, serving primarily as local church elders.

Phil Newton and Matt Schmucker posit that the missionary in the midst of a CPM needs to quickly implement a leadership structure that will continue on without their ongoing presence (Newton and Schmucker 2014). I contend that the local leadership team, like the missionary team, should have all five roles given to the church for the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:11).

By developing this leadership structure, missionary teams and churches will continue to raise up and develop local leaders in larger numbers and help them grow deeper in the knowledge of the word. Newton and Schmucker argue that if the missionaries will “train the trainers in the local places ... seminary training, while advantageous, is not essential. Local leaders can be taught doctrine, pastoral skills, and contextualized ecclesiology over time” (ibid., 229).

Conclusion

For many years I have read and listened to people on both sides of the CPM debate speaking past each other, missing one another’s passion for the greater desire of seeing God’s glory come among the nations. If those on both sides of the debate would take the time to sit with someone on the other side and listen, I think we would make progress

in bringing these two sides of the missiological table closer together. My desire over the years, which continues to this day, is to see healthy, reproducing churches multiplying in such a way that does not sacrifice urgency for health or health for urgency. Instead, we should hold both priorities in tension in order to move the work forward among a people group or in a city on God's timetable and for His glory.

Questions for Conversation

1. How does church health relate to church reproduction? Does one have priority over the other, either theologically or practically?
2. What do you think about the author's proposal for developing leaders? What might this look like in practice?
3. How do you understand the five roles of Ephesians 4 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd/pastor, and teacher)? What would such roles look like on a church-planting team? What would they look like in a church setting?

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