**Transformed Church Planting New Churches**

By Jimmy Tam

In 2000 I planted a bilingual Cantonese/Mandarin church in Los Angeles, USA. I worked hard at caring for our members and poured lots of effort into programs and events, drawing crowds of up to 100, but our regular membership remained around 50 adults.

Then in 2014 I began to lead our church on an intentional journey:

• from being recipients of and participants in church ministry

• to being missionaries to our community.

I first learned about church-planting movements at a training in Hong Kong. After just ninety minutes of training we went into a rough part of Hong Kong. To my astonishment we found a person there interested in hearing about Jesus. Back in L.A. I shared this experience with my church, and three months later arranged for the trainer to come offer training for our members to seek out people prepared for the gospel.

*Our Church Transition*

I prepared our members with one-liners in the bulletin like “Don’t bring people to the church, bring the church to them.” And I created and shared short video skits in our Sunday service, explaining why we would be *discouraging* people from bringing friends to church:

• What happens outside church is more important.

• We want to bring Jesus into families rather than bringing people to church.

We started a “love our neighbor” campaign to meet people around our church. We trained our members to say, “Jesus taught us to love our neighbors, and we want to do that. How can we pray for you?” With neighbors who received prayer we returned and asked, “Can we share a story of love that really encouraged us?” And with neighbors who let us share a story we asked:

• What do you think about Jesus?

• What do you think about this story?

• What is God telling you from this story?

• What does He want you to do?

• Who can we pray with you for?

*Contagious salvation*

We trained about twenty people in the beginning. Some of them didn't even belong to my church. I showed them about DMM and they started applying it. For example, they met a lady who had been bedridden for at least five months with kidney problems. She had dialysis three times a week and was in pain during the day. We came and visited her and shared with her the gospel. She was a Buddhist and didn’t know anything about Jesus but one of our team members shared her testimony of healing. This woman said, “Yes I want it! I want Jesus to heal me. Please pray for me.” So she prayed for her and immediately the pain went away. In three or four weeks her kidney problem was healed and she didn't need to have dialysis anymore!

She was immediately on fire for the Lord and very quickly wanted to be baptized. A month later, because of her healing, her daughter also turned to the Lord. She baptized her daughter and later baptized her husband and a neighbor.

Within about three months she had already baptized four people so the sister who had brought her to faith helped her start a home church. They now have nine or ten Buddhist-background people meeting on a regular basis at her home.

*Our New Normal*

In place of my Sunday sermon time we now have training, celebration and testimony from our members’ experiences in sharing over the past week. We now call our building a training center, not a church.

Now 70% of our members are making disciples and planting household churches in ten church-planting teams, each with two or more members.

Half a dozen of our families are leading new believers to do church in their homes and our college students have also started three or four seeker groups.

Now, instead of me baptizing people at our building, our members spontaneously baptize people and tell me about it afterward. Since we have equipped and emboldened them with training and experience, at least 50% of our members now actively share in their workplace.

Some families had been in our church for years, wanting to do something for the Lord. But they were not satisfied just running church programs. Now, within the last two years, they have become completely excited about going to people's homes, bringing Good News and baptizing them.

I recently saw a message from one of our women. She met a friend and started sharing the story of Jesus. This friend was very responsive and this sister felt like her friend was about to ready to believe and be baptized. She told me, “This friend has never been to the church. And she has to work on Sundays to support her family. If we had not done DMM, I don't think she would have ever thought about going to church or ever thought about Jesus. She felt like since she couldn’t go to church on Sunday she couldn’t be a follower of Jesus.”

Our church’s people now see things from the perspective of people who are lost. They don’t think, “Let’s invite people to church on Sunday.” They now know that *going* to people is more exciting and it's what changes peoples’ lives.

We now minimize time spent on running programs or internally focused groups. Every week on Sunday we have testimonies of people making disciples, praying for people, trying to share the gospel with people. We call Sunday the training time.

Every other Sunday we have just brief practical teaching/training, empowering people to continue to make disciples. Then we break into small groups of just three or four people – men with men and women with women. They hold each other accountable for their personal life and how they’re doing in making disciples and sharing the gospel and starting churches. Then they discuss a Scripture, go around and share what they got from it and pray for each other. About 80% of the church is involved in this kind of group.

Then on the odd Sundays we have what looks more like a regular Sunday service, with about 45 minutes of teaching or training. Sometimes we will have training in how to pray for the sick. Or how to identify people who are open or how to disciple people. Or how to run a home church. Sometimes we’ll have a teaching on Christian living, for increasing maturity.

**Key factors in progress**

1. I think prayer is the most important thing, if a church wants to make this decision. The enemy doesn't want us to make disciples for Jesus, to be effective. He wants us to stay in the four walls of the church building. So it’s essential to pray and really rely on the Spirit. We don't push people; we try to challenge them and we try to model for them.

2. I felt like if the church needs to make a change I have to be the one to demonstrate that I am willing and I'm active in changing my own lifestyle too. So I started leading my family to go to my neighborhood and talk to my neighbors. We would just knock on our neighbor's doors and say, “We are followers of Jesus, and he commands us to love our neighbors. We're here just to see how we can love you. We live next door and we just want to pray for you as a way of loving you.”

I have three young kids, so when they had basketball practices or soccer practices, I would start engaging other parents. While we were sitting on the sidelines to watch I would start sharing Jesus stories.

One thing that really encouraged our people and pushed them to try this new way of doing church was that they saw what I was doing. I was willing to do things that I didn't do before and step out of my comfort zone. That's why they were willing to do it too.

3. Another important key is that we make disciples as a family, with our kids. We encourage our families to not just leave their kids home and then go out to make disciples. We go out together to visit families as families. That’s another thing that's different than the institutional church, which tends to be very age segregated.

Previously, the Sunday service was the main focus of our church. Everything important happened in the Sunday service. But we had to shift people’s paradigm: changing the understanding of Sunday service was very important. It was quite challenging at the beginning. The idea of not inviting people to the church in the beginning seemed to some people to be heretical. It was challenging to change the old habits and the old mindset of the church as a building-centered ministry.

At present, we have:

* 11 active 1st generation churches (regular ongoing house church meeting)
* 38 active 2nd generation churches
* 23 active 3rd generation churches

Sources:

* Mar-April 2016 *Mission Frontiers*: [Caring Better For Members by Training Them to Multiply](http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/caring-better-for-members)
* July 2018 – interview