CHURCH-PLANTING IN THE ARAB-MUSLIM WORLD

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INTRODUCTION:

Compiling a booklet of guidelines as to how to form Muslim-convert churches in the Arab-Muslim world seems a presumptuous undertaking. No one, on the basis of visible results, can yet claim to be an expert in the field. No definable method has so brilliantly succeeded as to become a model of procedure. We increasingly realize that an unprecedented moving of the Spirit of God in these lands is the final and essential secret of effective church-planting. And yet, a generation of experience and of reflection and interchange with others involved in church-planting here will hopefully yield insights and principles which can be of help to others. Such we share, not as the method, but as an aid to further realization of our shared commitment to see local churches established throughout this part of the world as viable, visible, victorious expressions of that entity of which Scripture testifies, "...Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for her...".

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINITION OF TERMS:

CHURCH:

When we speak of the Church in our context, we certainly do not mean the building in which a congregation of Christians meets for corporate functions as believers. Most Muslim-convert churches across North Africa meet in private homes. The Church is people, not buildings or organizations. A.J. Wiebe has defined the Church Universal as follows:

"The church consists of all who, through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, have entered into the unique spiritual position of being 'in Christ' and thus related to the triune God (2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Cor. 12:13, Eph. 1:22,23). Through the action of the indwelling Holy Spirit, each believer, by virtue of his being 'in Christ', is brought into spiritual union with all other true believers, who thus constitute the Body, or the Universal Church (Eph. 4:4-6)."

The greater need is for clear definition of the time and space concretization of that universal, spiritual Body, in the visible church in a given locality at a given time. What does this entity look like and what are its functions?

We in NAM have sought progressively to clarify our common definition of the local church. The simplest definition is found in Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." We praise God for each one of the multiple demonstrations across our fields of the church in this embryonic form. The goal we have set as a mission goes beyond the embryo to the formed and functioning entity which we expect to develop from the embryo. In defining this entity, we have sought to avoid both the vagueness of concept which would paralyze progress toward a goal, and the structural rigidity which would prevent the diversity of expression in autonomous local churches in harmony with their ethnic and cultural identity.

In continuing development of the above definition of the Church, Wiebe states,

"The spiritual position and spiritual unity referred to lay the groundwork for a new relationship, not only between the believer and God, but also between the believer and fellow-Christians, the world, and non-believers. It is the corporate manifestation of this relationship, involving privileges and duties, which is commonly called 'the local church.'."

It is this corporate, visible, indigenous social entity that we are seeking to help come into being.

A local church, then, is a grouping of members of the Universal Church with sufficient structure to demonstrate its corporate identity within its given social and cultural context and to carry out its corporate functions of worship, edification and outreach.

We have defined what we believe to be essential elements of an autonomous functioning local church as follows:
1. Baptized believers
2. Christian families
3. Scripturally-qualified and locally recognized national leaders
4. Meeting place(s) independent of the expatriate church-planter
5. Assumption of responsibility for finances and ministry by the local group.

A few words of explanation may be in order for each of those elements:

1) We specify "baptized" believers because this seems to be the biblical means and mark of corporate identity as a church. Ten such would perhaps be the minimum number for a functioning group, although there is no biblical basis for setting a minimum number.
2) Worshipping groups in North Africa have historically been composed primarily of single young people. Experience indicates that only Christian families can provide the necessary stability, maturity, and ability to understand and minister to all the members. The Christian home is an indispensable place for fellowship, prayer, study of the Word, and counseling. Single believers, many of whom are isolated islands in the hostile sea of their Muslim environment, need a haven in the atmosphere of a home away from home. The access of young single believers to such a home in Algiers is perhaps the greatest single reason for a functioning indigenous group in that city today. Prayer, counseling, encouragement, and vision were always available in a sister's house, even though her husband was not a believer. The missionary family, being a foreign element, cannot fill the gap. Only national families can provide the atmosphere necessary for a church to develop properly.
3) Seeking to make groups function as churches without scripturally qualified leaders has led to three problems:
    a. Expatriate leadership has become the quasi-permanent pattern, and the church has never developed into an autonomous, indigenous, independently-functioning church. A long-standing member of the worshipping group in Casablanca once said to me, "The church in this city will never function without the missionaries." The expectation of an independent church, if ever fostered, had apparently died.
    b. A democratic form of government has been introduced where all believers have equal authority. Against such a precedent it is next to impossible to establish biblical leadership. A young brother gave as his reason for defecting from the evangelical group in Casablanca to the Seventh-Dan Adventists, "At least we know who is in charge over there."
    c. Nationals who do not have the support of the local group are thrust into the role of leaders. This creates unstable and factious groups, unable to grow because continually falling apart. A missionary nearing the end of a long career in Morocco confided that he felt one of the key reasons why repeated attempts to establish an independently functioning church in one of the main cities of Morocco had failed was the repeated missionary recognition of leaders who did not have the confidence and support of their own people. Qualified leaders formed according to the model outlined in 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1 will have the loyalty of the local group, and will not shrink from assuming responsibility for that group.

4) The missionary's home being the church meeting place in North Africa has proved an effective deterrent to national leaders truly making and carrying out their own decisions. The group must meet in

some place for which they themselves, not the expatriate church-planter, are responsible. The Scriptures support this thesis. The church in Corinth met in the house of Gaius (Rom. 16:23). It is significant that, although Paul used the house of Titius Justus as his center of ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:17), there is no mention of this as a "church home", either in the epistle to the Corinthians, or in that to the Romans, written from Corinth. Again in Ephesus it is the home of Aquila and Priscilla which is mentioned as the "church home", (1 Cor. 16:19), not the school of Tyrannus, which had been Paul's center of ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). In the Arab-Muslim world, these independent meeting places will commonly be private homes, rather than public halls.

5) Internal responsibility is important for continuation of the group independently of the church-planter. Finances is perhaps the most delicate area. Although indigenous financing is a long-established church-planting principle, it tends to be lost sight of in the smallness of groups and the generally low economic standing of believers in this part of the world. John Nevius remarked nearly a century ago in his book, The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches, that the church will be strong in proportion to what the members do with what they have. She will be weak in proportion to what they do with what the foreign worker provides. While indigenous financing does not preclude all forms of material sharing in the needs of churches, it does mean that nationals themselves must assume the predominant role in meeting the financial needs of the local group, and that control of the local group's finances must be in the hands of the leaders of that group. It is the giving, not the receiving church which will be stable and mature.

The entity of the local church in the Arab-Muslim world will be a group of ten or more baptized believers, demonstrating corporate unity around the nucleus of a Christian family or families, loyally supporting and following national leaders(s), most likely gathering in national homes, and assuming internal responsibility for both finances and ministry.

CHURCH-PLANTER:

Although this term has certain biblical support in 1 Cor. 4, where Paul say, "I planted, Apollos watered, God gave the increase", the term itself is extra-biblical. It is used today in a much broader sense than the scriptural connotation of the initial sowing of the seed through the preaching of the Gospel. The term as used today refers to the whole process of evangelizing, discipling, training, and organizing until a group of believers comes to a level of development permitting it to function as a viable church, independently of the agent(s) which have brought it into being.

Following from the above definition of church-planting, we conclude that a church-planter is the catalytic human agent of the divine process of church development from the point of planting the seed through that of seeing believers gathered in Jesus' name to that of seeing the viable entity function apart from the catalyst.

In a field strategy outline in 1975, NAM's General Director described our mission goal as follows:

> "To evangelize Muslims in North Africa and Europe, nurturing them in the faith, with a view towards establishing local churches in North Africa, which will be indigenous and self-propagating."

This definition leads to the following conclusions:
1. The church-planter's role in a given locality is temporary, the church is permanent.
2. The culmination of the church-planter's task is the transfer of authority and responsibility for the local church to men qualified to lead (see 2 Tim. 2:2).
3. The church-[planter's top priority should be finding and preparing the individuals whom God has chosen to lead that particular church (Acts 20:17-35).

CHURCH LEADERS:

In the light of our diverse and primarily western backgrounds, a definition of church leaders also seems necessary. In the New Testament, leadership of the local church is invested in a plurality of men called

elders, bishops or overseers, pastors and teachers. These terms are used interchangeably of the same body of leaders, but stress different aspects of their leadership roles. Cf. Acts 20:17-28, where we find "elders," "overseers," and "to shepherd" (i.e. pastor); Tit. 1:5,7, where we find "elders" and "bishops" (or overseers); 1 Peter 5:1,2 where we find that "elders are to "feed the flock" (i.e. pastor), and "take the oversight" (i.e. bishop, overseer). The verbs being used here rather than the corresponding nouns.

Plural leadership need not exclude the possibility of a full-time pastor. Acts 12:17; 21:18 and Gal. 2:12 indicate that James may have filled such a role in the Jerusalem church. It does exclude, however, the possibility of one man assuming dictatorial authority in the oversight and care of the church. Acts 21:18 qualifies the emphasis on James with "and all the elders were present".

Deacons are also mentioned, both in Phil. 1:1 and in 1 Tim. 3:8-13, as a category of church leadership distinct from and presumably subordinate to, the category described above. Their functions are not clearly outlined in scripture, however. Nor is it clear that they were a regular and permanent feature of church leadership. Their place and function in the present day New testament church will therefore be determined by local desire and need.

CHAPER TWO: THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Most purported church-planters claim to be planting, or propose to plant "New Testament churches." There is great confusion, however, as to what constitutes the New Testament church. Any number of varied forms of church structure and activity are claimed to be New Testament. And others reject all current forms and patterns and seek to come up with something original which will be a "New Testament church."

We meet on the common denominator of allegiance to the New Testament as our rule of faith and practice as concerns the local church. There is a two-fold implication of this common commitment:
1) Principles and procedures will be drawn from, and tested by, the New Testament. We will not introduce practices contrary to it, even when such might be sanctioned by church history.
2) We will not seek to be more inflexible than the New Testament. Where it defines specifically, we will be dogmatic. In matters concerning which it does not clearly delineate, we will allow liberty within the limits of clearly-stated New testament principles.

With that background, let us consider the New Testament Church from the New Testament itself. I find at least four New Testament models of the Church. You may be able to find more.

First is the model of the church in Jerusalem, founded at Pentecost. As to leadership, we find this church first under the apostles (Acts 4:33,35; 5:2), then under the apostles and a group chosen to deal with certain practical needs (Acts 6:1-6). Although there is no indication in the passage that the mandate of this group went beyond the specific Hellenistic/Judaistic problem which occasioned their appointment, some see this as the beginning of the order of deacons in the church.

Next we find this church under the leadership of "the apostles and elders" (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23). There are intimations that James was increasing in prominence as a leader during this period. Peter singles him out in instructing those gathered in Mary's house to inform the church of his release from prison (Acts 12:17). He takes the lead role in the Council decision of Acts 15, although the letter to the Gentile churches attributes the decision to "the apostles and elders." And in Acts 21:18 Paul is received by "James and the elders," the apostles no longer being in the picture at this point.

As to form and function, we find this church living in total community of assets (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35), meeting in various places at various times, apparently in both full and sub-congregational meetings (Acts 2:46), involved in worship, ministry of the Word, fellowship, administration of the sacraments, prayer and testimony (Acts 2:41-47). Teaching and preaching were done primarily by the apostles (Acts 2:42; 6:2,4), although others, such as Stephen (Acts 6:8-11) were also actively engaged in ministry. Some will conclude that this, since the first and therefore, presumably, the purest model, is that which we should adopt. Others will argue that this model represents a transitory period of church development in the Scriptures and is therefore not a valid model for the New Testament church of today.

Second, we have the model of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26;13:1-3), probably the first predominately Gentile church. This church was evidently founded by laymen (Acts 11:20,21). Two leaders apart from the founders, and foreign to the congregation , Barnabas and Saul, played a significant, if not dominant, role in the establishment and growth of the new church. Then we find the church under the joint leadership of these two imported leaders and men who were presumably native to this congregation. At a given point in the church's development, the two imported leaders were commissioned to go out from that church to a new church-planting ministry. The church was then left in the care of the three other men named in Acts 13:1. It is possible that some or all of these were also founding fathers of that church, although the passage does not specify this.

As to function in Antioch, we find worship (13:2), ministry of the Word (11:26), testimony (11:26), practical aid to sister churches (11:30) and missionary outreach (13:3). The leadership team is designated as "prophets and teachers" rather than elders, overseers, or pastors.

Third is the model of the churches founded by Paul and his church-planting teams. There are significant enough variations in the details that are given in the Acts and the Epistles concerning these churches to prevent the drawing up of a definite and dogmatic model. Yet there does seem to be a similarity of pattern involving a temporary apostolic founding period (from three weeks to two years), and the appointment of plural local leadership, usually termed elders. Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3 refer to the leadership of bishops or overseers and include deacons.

The church at Ephesus may serve as an example of these churches. Details concerning the church at Ephesus can be found in Acts 18:20, 1 Cor. 16:8,9, 1 Tim. 3:1-13 and Rev. 2:1-7. Paul first left Aquila and Priscilla as witnesses in this city. Their home later became the meeting place, or one of the meeting places, for the church. Apollos joined Aquila and Priscilla for a period and left a group of disciples with an incomplete faith. Paul then returned, completed that which was lacking in Apollos' ministry, and stayed on for two years. Within just over three months after Paul's leaving, the church was under the leadership of elders, as we find in Acts 20. Later in Paul's letter to Timothy, who was then at Ephesus, he included both elders (bishops, overseers) and deacons in his instructions concerning ongoing leadership.

As to function, the emphasis seems to be on ministry of the Word. Although the epistle to the Ephesians has the Church as its main theme, it offers few particulars about form and function in the church in Ephesus. We will be looking later at some of the salient general principles concerning the Church in this epistle.

And fourthly, we have the possible model of the seven churches of the Revelation. The one salient feature of these churches would be the phrase "the angel (messenger) of the church." If this "angel" refers to the leader, these seven letters would be a strong indication of a single-pastor form of church leadership by the end of the New Testament writings.

Some would conclude, therefore, that this is the model of church government for today. But the doubtfulness of this interpretation makes this example of questionable value as a church-planting model. It may, however, give a picture of what churches were like at the end of the first century AD

We can also learn something of the New Testament Church from the images by which it is described. These are found and developed primarily in the epistle to the Ephesians. The first is that of a body (Eph. 4 and 1 Cor. 12). The emphasis is on vital union of the whole body to the Head, and on the reciprocal ministries of member to member under the control of the head for the healthy growth of all. The key concept is organism, i.e. inter-personal relationships, rather than organization.

The second image is that of a building (Eph. 2 and 1 Cot. 3). The emphasis is on stability in foundation, in building materials, and in manner of building. The key concept is dwelling, God making His home by the Sprit in His people, the Church.

The third image is that of a bride (Eph. 5 and Rev. 21:2, 22:17). The emphasis is on relationship, Christ being the Bridegroom and the Church His eternal bride.

There are also incidental references in a number of passages which give intimations of how different New Testament churches were organized and how they functioned. Most of these will be considered in more detail later, so we will only briefly summarize at this point:

As to meetings, we have noted that the church in Jerusalem met daily, and that meetings were held both in the temple (presumably large general meetings) and in different private homes (presumably smaller sub-congregational gatherings). In Corinth it appears that there was a regular weekly meeting on Sunday (1 Cor. L6:1,2), and this practice is inferred also for the churches in Galatia. The church at Troas also had a communion service on Sunday. This particular one was at night, probably because most people had to work during the day (Acts 20:17).

As to meeting places, they seemed to be for the most part in private homes. As to form of meetings, we have noticed that they involved ministry of the Word, administration of the sacraments, fellowship, and

material sharing. Instructions in 1 Cor. 14:20-36 indicate that there was an open participatory form of meeting which sometimes got out of control. Acts 20 and the glimpse of the meeting in Troas indicate that meetings were not time-controlled and oriented.

We conclude that the New Testament gives the broad parameters of how a church should be organized and how it should function. Within these parameters there is ample scope for pragmatic variation in the details of government order and function so as to meet the above needs. I suggest the following parameters:

1) Complete subjection to and identification with the Head;
2) Healthy organic relationships within the church so that the vitality of the Head can be communicated by the Spirit through the body to each of its members;
3) Demonstration of corporate identity. (Administration of the sacraments would be an important element of this.)
4) Enabling the church to fulfill its function to God in worship;
5) Enabling the church to fulfill its internal function of edification; this would involve teaching of the Word, fellowship of the body, and discipline;
6) Enabling the church to fulfill its function to the world in witness.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT IS NEEDED TO ESTABLISH A NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

This chapter will concentrate on the human elements required They are considered in the light of the full realization that the Church cannot be humanly established. Apart from the Holy Spirit's working, no New Testament church ever has or ever will be planted.

First of all, there must be effective evangelism and discipleship. The whole will not be stronger than its component parts. Conversion in this part of the world is more often a process than a crisis. This makes the church-planting process more complex than it appears to be in other areas of the world. Whatever its visible manifestation, conversion must result in realization of forgiveness, receiving of spiritual life, and meaningful committal to the Lordship of Christ.

Discipleship must produce, not only a knowledge of the Word, but also strong inter-personal relationships among believers, and a spirit of discipling others. Without these features a church will not continue long to function independently of the church-planter.

Secondly, there must be sufficient stable and stabilizing elements to keep the church from disintegrating. A nucleus of families is one of these elements. A core group with solid inter-personal relationships is another. Financial independence for enough of the members to make the group economically viable is another. A sufficient leadership core to fulfill the pastoral needs of the church is another. The church-planter or church-planting team often provides this stabilizing factor in the beginning. The danger is that the church will become permanently dependent on this team. Until such elements are flourishing within the group apart from the church-planter, his task is yet incomplete. Expatriate church-planters seemed to provide the chief stabilizing factors in the church in Algiers for nearly ten years. Had they had to leave before like elements from the national group began to function effectively, their church-planting mission would have aborted, or would have had to be taken over by someone else.

Thirdly, correct attitudes must be developed and maintained both in the church-planter and in the church group. As to the former, the following are essential:
1) Solid commitment to the goal of a church functioning independently of himself. Without this commitment it is too easy to become by default the permanent pastor of the group, short-circuiting the church's development and side-tracking one's own ministry of planting churches. It could be advantageous to assign church-planters to an area for a limited period, say five years, at the end of which they should expect to have a group ready to continue functioning without them.
2) Single-mindedness in pursuing the goal. There are a multitude of valid and important ministries that the church-planter can become involved in. Without a careful setting and maintaining of priorities in light of the goal, one will soon find his energies and time diverted to other very pressing needs. This is increasingly important as more and more expatriate church-planters are functioning in secular jobs as their basis for residency in Arab-Muslim lands and therefore time and energy available for church-planting are in increasing short supply.
3) Perseverance. Very particularly in the Arab-Muslim world is this quality essential. Near the beginning of my career in North Africa, a young contemporary said as he prepared to leave the field after less than one year, "I just don't believe that there will ever be a significant turning from Islam to Christ, and don't intend to sink my life into a lost cause." We are still in the Arab-Muslim world after more than 25 years of relatively little harvest, sustained by belief that the breakthrough for the church in these lands must come. To date the process has been complex and long-term. We long and hope continually for that mighty moving of the Spirit of God, which will bring years of effort to fruition in days and will cause churches to spring up in multiple areas of our field. Whether that takes place next week or next year or in the next decade, we are called to persevere in prayer and preparation for the planting of churches according to God's tempo and program.
4) Dependence on God and the working of His Spirit. The moment we begin to depend on our gifts, our efforts, our methods, we will cease to function effectively as church-planters. Only as we maintain the attitude of being agents and stewards of God, totally dependent on His working, will we make progress in establishing true New Testament churches.

As the church-planter has right attitudes within himself, so he must inculcate, foster, and pray into being right attitudes on the part of those he is discipling toward the formation of the church. Over and above such attitudes as humility, dependence on God, love towards others, etc., which would be part of any discipleship program, the following are essential to church functioning:

1) Commitment to the body, the Church. Repeatedly in North Africa our discipleship programs have produced believers with strong commitment to the Lord, but weak or nil commitment to the Body. The result is a multiplicity of isolated believers, but no church, or a church severely weakened by lack of the gifts and ministries of those who have isolated themselves from its fellowship. Brother Ahmed has a stronger administrative gift than I have seen in any other Moroccan believer. But after a year of strong contribution he withdrew from the church. The lack of his gift leaves the group still floundering in its organizational life. We must emphasize commitment to the church as strongly as we do commitment to the Lord.

2) commitment to solve problems within the group, rather than to run from them or ignore them. I know a dear brother who has a twenty-year history of withdrawal and re-entry as concerns his local fellowship. He returns periodically and contributes very enthusiastically for a few weeks or months. Then something happens to upset or offend him and he drops out for a few months or years, only to reappear again one day as though nothing had happened. The greatest difficulty in local churches being established in North Africa is that of inter-personal relationship problems. A covering over of such and pretending that they are not there saps the vitality of the group. A withdrawal from them rather than solving them results in continual disintegration of the critical mass. There must, therefore, be solid commitment to living out the principles of Matt. 5:23,24 and 18:15-18.

3) Commitment to continuing function as a church in the face of opposition and persecution. Unless the corporate identity and function of the church take priority over personal safety, a Muslim-convert church in today's Arab-Muslim world will not stand. Level of functioning may become more low-key, certain group activities may be stopped for a period, or carried on in smaller groups. But there must be a strong commitment to function as a body or the corporate identity will disappear under pressure. In the early 1970's the church in Casablanca met under appointed national leadership in a semi-public evangelistic hall. Policemen invaded the hall, haled the leaders to the police station for interrogations, and forbade them to continue meeting. A short time later, the church re-grouped in an expatriate missionary home. In 1982, the expatriate meeting place became too vulnerable and the group decided to begin meeting in different national homes, meeting in two different groups each week, each group rotating among different homes, so as to lower the profile as much as possible. At this point expatriates ceased attending the meetings for security reasons. In 1984, during a period of widespread repression of known or suspected Christians, all regularly organized meetings were disbanded. This is obviously not ideal for church development. But the corporate identity had been maintained, even during this period, by personal visits and impromptu times of Bible study, prayer and fellowship.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGY

Having identified the key elements to the founding of New Testament churches, we now need to think more practically about how we should go about creating, or facilitating the creation of those elements.

Church-planting strategy must logically begin with effective EVANGELISM. In the Muslim world, this is usually a more slowly moving process than in the Western world. We will deal more with the process in the next chapter. Effective evangelism is that which bring individuals and families to an unequivocal transfer from Islam to Christianity with a full commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Multiple approaches and methods may be brought into play. But the strategy must be one, i.e., bringing people to 100% allegiance to Jesus Christ. Society in the Muslim world is family and group oriented, rather than individual-oriented. Effective evangelism, then, will also be aimed at family and friendship groupings, rather than just at individuals. The Gospel needs to be presented clearly, and the issues involved spelled out clearly so that a meaningful choice can be made. And then we trust God for the indispensable regenerating work of the Holy Spirit without which evangelism can never reach its goal.

Effective evangelism then naturally moves into effective DISCIPLESHIP. The strategy here, in terms of church-planting, must be the forming of the critical mass, the cohesive nucleus of the church.

For more than ten years, I have observed the ministry of an elderly Moroccan who has a strong gift of evangelism. But he has been consistently unable to maintain relationships with his fellow-believers because of a deep-seated and easily expressed mistrust of other Moroccan Christians. In speaking of the church in another city, several of the members of which had suffered for and maintained their faith under severe trial, he dismissed them all as hypocrites. Such an attitude is obviously not fertile ground for growth of churches. Therefore, building trust and in-depth relationships among believers and families or other sub-groupings of believers will receive as strong emphasis as the individual character building that we have historically concentrated on in discipleship programs. Lack of trust is perhaps the single greatest barrier to creating and maintaining the cohesiveness factor in Muslim-convert churches. Only as there is a sufficient core group with strong bonds of mutual trust and loyalty will the church continue independently of its planter. And only when church members have the mind-set of risking the placing of trust in new believers will the church grow. Without this mind-set it becomes a closed, inward-looking, ghetto-complexed group. In-depth relationships are rare in the Arab-Muslim world, outside of the family grouping. Even within that grouping, relationships are more often cemented by fear and necessity than by love and trust.

Discipleship must seek to set in motion a new web of in-depth relationships within the spiritual family, cemented by trust, loyalty, and love.

As the critical mass of cohesive nucleus s formed and we are ready to move forward into conscious functioning as a church, we must seek to create and encourage VIABLE STRUCTURES which will last independently of the church-planter and in the face of intensive opposition.

Of capital importance in this is a continuing emphasis on organism relationships rather than on organizational structures. The visible form and structure of a church group without sufficient relationship strength will produce a lifeless shell at its best, and will unavoidably disintegrate under extreme pressure. Strong relationships will weather the storms of opposition and will continue to function informally as a body, even when it may become impossible to function on a formally-organized church meeting level. Personal visiting and caring relationships are hard for a hostile government or society to ban.

These relationships must be developed on a national-to-national level. Too often has the church-planter become the axis of relationships. It seems easier for nationals to maintain strong relationships with the expatriate missionary than with their national brothers and sisters. A. was a young single, known and accepted as a Christian by the church in Casablanca, where he had recently moved for study and work. He commented, "When I need counsel and encouragement, there is not one of the national homes here to which I feel free to go. The only place I am sure of a welcome is in the missionary's home." But having the web of relationships pass through the church-planter as the hub will not be a structure which will last. That pattern, usually the easiest to establish, should therefore be studiously avoided.

As concerns meeting places, I believe that the only viable lasting structure for Muslim-convert churches is the private dwellings of church members. Whereas we agree on the principle of the house church, we have tended historically to apply that concept as a transitional expediency rather than as a permanent principle. As long as the total Christian community in a given locality is small enough to be contained in someone's living room, we have a house church. As the group grow, we look for a larger meeting place, be it a rented hall, a borrowed church building, or whatever. I believe that the house church of from 10 to 20 members should remain the basic unit around which we should expect the church to develop. Growth would then be expressed in terms of multiplying groups, rather than in terms of an ever expanding group. This pattern would permit unlimited growth, regardless of how large the total Christian community became in a given locality.

This concept is biblical, first of all. The New Testament presents the picture of the church in a private home on a least five different occasions (Rom. 16:5,23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phm. 2). We have no way of knowing, of course, how large were the groups meeting in each home. Perhaps they had large courtyards in which a hundred or more could meet. We read of 120 gathered in the upper room of John Mark's family home just before Pentecost. We can be quite sure, however, that the 3,000 converted on the day of Pentecost did not all meet in the same home at the same time to break bread. The principle is that the space available in the home should determine the size of the group meeting there. The size of the total number of Christians in a given locality should not determine the type of meeting place required. Whether we have 10 or 10,000, we still meet in homes, as many as needed to accommodate the total number.

Secondly, such groups would be more suitable to the low profile essential to Christian meetings for Muslim converts. I have seen semi-public meeting places invaded by police in all three countries of North Africa in which I have worked. Further meetings have been forbidden and the leaders harassed and threatened. Although private homes are also vulnerable, a meeting-hall designed and known as such will be more highly vulnerable. Relatively small groups in private homes are much safer from police interference than are semi-public gatherings in special buildings set apart for that purpose.

Thirdly, this concept of house churches would encourage greater assumption of responsibility by nationals and would, therefore, more quickly develop national leaders. It must seem unnatural for nationals, just beginning to feel their way in their new faith, to function alongside of, or take over from, foreigners whom they see as more highly trained and specialized. But fifty believers in a given city, meeting in three to five different homes, would open an immediate and obvious need for at least that may leaders, each one with a vital responsibility and ministry without appearing to usurp the place of someone more qualified than he.

The danger of fragmentation in such groups should be countered by stressing from the outset the concept that the house group is not an independent unit, complete in itself, but rather one cell in the church body of the given locality. Opportunity should also be provided for periodic wider fellowship groupings, such as:
1) An "open house" on special occasions, when people could move in and out freely all day. This would be less volatile than a regularly-held large meeting.
2) Reciprocal visiting on an informal basis beyond the bounds of the particular group with which one regularly meets.
3) Picnics, beach parties, birthday parties, etc., giving socially acceptable occasions for larger gatherings.

As concerns lasting leadership structure, I believe the only viable model, at least for the beginning of the Muslim-convert churches, is that of self-supporting, national lay leaders. We have seen that this is the most commonly mentioned form of leadership in the churches of the New Testament. These will be less vulnerable in times of persecution if they do not have official titles and formally designated positions. They do, however, need to be clearly recognized and respected. Their being self-supporting is vital to a strong testimony in Muslim lands where the suspicion reigns that professed conversion and Christian service are always with a view to economic and/or social gain.

The church must function on a principle of voluntary rather than paid service. The almost automatic reaction among Muslims to one of their own countrymen beginning to exercise a Christian ministry is,

"How much are you being paid for it, and by whom?" This principle holds true, not only at the leadership level, but right down through the membership also.

A church which will survive and grow must develop culturally acceptable forms of worship, government, and function. Should worshippers squat on floor mats, be seated in rows or around the walls of the room on padded benches which form the common seating in a Moroccan living room? Should seating be mixed male/female or segregated? Should singing be pat of worship? With or without instruments? These are all areas of liberty within the afore-mentioned parameters of the New Testament church. It seems that very little anthropological research has been done to find any other than purely subjective answers to such pragmatic questions. Suffice it here to state the underlying principle which should govern both research and application. The forms adopted must be conducive to four purposes:
1) They should foster a spirit of worship and encourage participation in that worship.
2) They should make nationals feel at home in a church gathering.
3) They should be such that nationals themselves can easily adopt and carry on without the presence of the expatriate church-planter.
4) They should communicate a clear Christian message without syncretistic confusion.

And finally, the church will best develop and grow in that language or dialect which the members themselves feel most comfortable with, whether literary or dialectical Arabic, one of the Berber languages, French or English. In may churches there will perhaps be a mixture of two or several. We should encourage that.

Our strategy can be briefly summarized as follows:
1) Effective evangelism which will produce wholehearted, meaningful commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
2) Effective discipleship which will emphasize depth of relationships and the forming of a critical mass of believers committed to one another as well as to Jesus Christ.
3) Establishing local worshipping and witnessing groups, stronger on organism relationships than on organizational structure, and functioning in viable forms which will take root and grow in native soil beyond the watering and cultivating activity of the church-planter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROCESS

As we think of the process of church-planting, we need to remind ourselves again of that which is non-negotiable principle, and what is negotiable pragmatism.

Non-negotiable principles can be summarized as follows:
1) The church must be a true and faithful representative of her Head, Jesus Christ.
2) The church must be true to the written Word, the Bible.
3) The church must function by spiritual life, not be organizational rules.
4) The church must be an internally-cohesive organism.
5) The church must function in structural forms viable to and adoptable by its members in their cultural setting.
6) The church must be formed so as to outlast its planter.
7) The church must be an effective communicator of the Gospel so as to reproduce itself in other local churches.

We have noted earlier that the process of church-planting is pragmatic within the parameter of New Testament principles, the method which works being the one which should be used in any given situation.

At the risk of appearing to have only one string on my fiddle, I repeat that the one absolutely indispensable element is the working of God's Spirit. The process may vary widely from place to place and situation to situation. But unless our methods, whatever they may be, are enlivened and empowered by the Spirit, they will be ineffectual and fruitless. The process must be carried out from beginning to end in this conviction. An integral part of whatever we do in whatever stage of the process, therefore, will be a continual crying out to God for, and laboring in expectation of, that outpouring of His Spirit which alone will result in true churches.

The process must necessarily begin with the preparation of the church-planter. We will not concentrate on the spiritual preparation here, although that is obviously fundamental. Apart from the character transformation which is the continuing process of any healthy spiritual life, I see three important components of spiritual preparation for planting Muslim-background churches.

First is a knowledge of and ability to use effectively the Word of God; second is a conviction of and practical experience of the ministering work of the Holy Spirit; third is a conviction of and experience in the central place of prayer in ministry.

The practical preparation of the church-planter will include language acquisition and cultural orientation and adaptation. In the initial stage of a church-planting ministry, priority should be given to that preparation. It is a mistake, however, to consider this period as purely preparatory, after which our "ministry" will begin. Relationship patterns will begin to form as soon as the new worker arrives. Long before one is able to communicate effectively in the language of the country, one will become known, either as being open and approachable or as being cold and unwelcoming. I knew a missionary family in Tunisia who, with minimal language facility, had a long-standing and effective ministry to nationals by the warmth of their personalities and home. Relationships are the practical key to ministry in the Arab world. The positive or negative reputation gained while one is struggling with cultural adaptation and language acquisition will, therefore, have a profound effect on one's long-term ministry. The essential pattern of open, friendly approachability in both personal and home atmosphere will largely be confirmed or negated during this initial preparation period.

The initial step of friendship evangelism should begin immediately upon entry into the target country. Arab-Muslims in general are eager for friendship with westerners and are curious about what they believe and how they practice it. Many communicate well enough in English and/or French that building of relationships can begin immediately, regardless of the degree of language proficiency. The casual contacts of everyday living will provide multiple opportunities for friendships, if we show ourselves open for such. We should be continually on the alert for those with whom God wants us to be forming relationships. We need to be careful to treat people as equals, not as "contacts" which we wish to exploit for our own ends.

Individuals quickly sense and are turned off by an attitude of superiority or professionalism in our seeking to share the Gospel with them.

We must realize, of course, as we strive to build open and friendly relationships, that there is a whole multitude of hustlers eagerly waiting to prey upon the naiveté of the foreigner and to exploit him/her for their own material ends. We should not be naïve in our friendliness. Encourage the legitimate desire to practice English, the curiosity concerning Christianity and the Bible, the natural love of discussion. Discourage the overt or covert request for help to get a passport or a job or lodging in Europe or North America. Discourage also the desire to help find a European or North-American wife. And be very cautious in offering or holding out hope of material aid. We should be generous, there are legitimate needs which God would have us help meet. But we need to avoid creating the impression that response to the message of Christ carries with it a virtual guarantee of an improvement in economic state. Exactly the opposite is likely to be true, and increasingly so as the church develops and opposition against it hardens.

The easiest way to avoid being exploited is to withdraw from the people of the land, to consort with Westerners, limiting contacts with nationals to "ministry forays" upon completion of which we withdraw once again into our separate world. But such an attitude will largely annul our effectiveness as church-planters. We should not make ourselves easy and needless prey to exploitation. But we will never develop a 100% sure instinct as to who is sincere in his spiritual search and who is using it as a means to other ends. We will be duped on numerous occasions. Making mistakes and being exploited is a price we will have to pay for developing an effective ministry in this part of the world. A colleague recently poured his life for months into discipling a newly-professed convert, only to have the fellow steal a sizable amount of money from his room one day and abruptly stop coming. So how does the missionary react? He continues to pour his life into discipling other young men, praying consistently for repentance and restoration for the one who robbed him.

As we concentrate on the developing of relationships, we need to be relatively high profile as to our existential experience of Christianity. There will be early and multiple opportunities to express what we believe and how it works in our lives. Practical testimony of what God is doing in our live, working out problems, meeting needs that we face, will be an effective preparation to awaken the desire of a Muslim to know this same experience. I have met a baptized believer from the deep south of Morocco who began his spiritual pilgrimage through the challenge of seeing the relationships and the attitudes to life manifested in an expatriate Christian family for whom he worked for a period. His quest led him two years later to a national Christian in Casablanca who discipled and then baptized him. We should avoid too early "preaching" of the Gospel in terms of emphasizing that this is the truth which the Muslim must accept in order to escape the dire consequences of unbelief. This is true, and an essential part of our message. But a too direct and abrupt approach is more likely to drive the hearer to a defense of his own religion that to serious consideration of the faith being presented to him. The facts of the Gospel can be as effectively communicated in terms of "this is what Christians believe", as in terms of "this is what you must believe." Personal application of those facts should then be made as the person's interest develops and he/she begins to manifest spiritual concern. And we must remind ourselves again and again that effective application of the Gospel can only be made by the Holy Spirit. He knows best when and how to bring home personally to an individual the testimonial or doctrinal or applicational aspect of this message.

Our object in evangelism, after all, is not the mere imparting of the facts of the Gospel, but bringing the hearer to a meaningful step of faith. This "step" is more often a process in the Muslim world than it is an instantaneous crisis decision. A "profession of faith" from a North African who hears the Gospel in a friendship context is relatively easy to obtain. Experience proves that this is more often due to the innate cultural desire to avoid disagreeing with the friend than it is to a change of heart conviction. Even where the initial profession of faith has deepened into sincere committal of faith over a process of time, it has come to light months or years later that the expatriate missionary has considered the national to be a true believer a considerable time before the national has. This points up the importance of a private transaction between the individual and God. I very seldom ask a North African to make a decision and pray a prayer of acceptance of Christ in front of me. I seek to lead him to a clear understanding of the facts and implications of the Gospel. I may even suggest a model prayer which he can use as his prayer of

committal. Then I make it clear that the final step is between him and God. And then I entrust him to God the Holy Spirit who alone can regenerate a soul.

The fact that conversion is more often a process than a crisis in this part of the world also means that there is often no clear-cut line between evangelism and discipleship. Whereas the emphasis is obviously different, the one often blends into the other without a clear indication of just where in the process the disciple is.

The main goal of discipleship would be to develop such a relationship between the believer and his Lord and between the believer and other believers as to create the inner spiritual vitality and the intimacy of inter-personal relationships which are essential to the health of a local church. Assimilation of the Word and vital interaction with God, and with other believers, in prayer will be two chief means to that end.

We will obviously use some method to accomplish that purpose. There are a number of such available. Or you may come up with your own distinct method. Whatever method used should depend totally and emphasize continually the work of the Spirit in making it effective. With that condition the methods will vary, depending on individual style of ministry, individual gifts, and individual assessment of what will best bring the disciple to the desire goal.

As to relationship with God, the disciple must be brought to know HIM, not just to know about Him. Seeing God's work for forty years in the wilderness left the Israelites an unbelieving people, unqualified to enter into God's triumphal purpose for hem. It is testified of Moses on the other hand that he "knew God's ways". And consequently "God spoke to him face to face as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). The knowledge of God will lead to the total committal of oneself to Him. The prime goal of discipleship is this total commitment, which will give the Holy Spirit full liberty to reproduce the life of Christ within him/her, and manifest that life in relationships with other believers and to the world of unbelievers. Discipleship in this sense is a lifelong process in which each believer should be at any given time both a disciple and a discipler. The basic pattern of development in this process needs to be set early in the life of faith. Our goal in discipleship, therefore, is the establishing of a continuing pattern, not the final polishing of a perfect specimen.

This central relationship with God must have its outworking in the marketplace of everyday living. Biblical relationships with God will manifest themselves in biblical relationships with other humans, rather than in a monastery of isolation.

In the context of church planting, the first and most important category of relationships are those with fellow-believers. We have spoken earlier of the importance of commitment to the Body as well as to the Head. While North Africans are very sociable beings, innate mistrust of others tends to keep social relationships on a superficial level.

Discipleship must concentrate on developing relationships among believers to the level of commitment and cohesion required for a viable functioning church. Breakdown of inter-personal relationships among the members of a local fellowship is the greatest barrier to the establishing of churches that I have encountered.

Evangelism is usually more effective one-on-one or in very small groupings of those who already know and trust one another. But getting new believers acquainted and interacting with other believers should begin early in the discipleship process and needs to be one of its main emphases. As these relationships develop, we must encourage patterns of trust. Again we will find ourselves cast on the Holy Spirit to create these bonds between believers. The tendency is for the expatriate missionary to become the apex and fulcrum of fellowship lines. It seems easier for nationals to trust and bond to an expatriate than to other nationals. This pattern should be consistently counteracted.

The critical mass cohesion force will only be reached as strong lines of national-national relationships are developed. As means to that end we should encourage interaction among believers living geographically near to each other; we should capitalize on natural friendship relationships which may already exist (inquirers often come in twos); we should create situations, perhaps in our own homes initially, but

increasingly in national homes, where believers can relate to one another on an informal, non-meeting basis.

In the repressive and antagonistic atmosphere surrounding believers in an Islamic society, there is constant danger of believers, individually and in small sub-groupings, developing isolationist attitudes. Self-preservation and security become higher priorities than evangelism and church growth, and a "ghetto community" mentality results. Biblical relationships with non-believers must therefore also be an integral part of the discipleship process. I do not encourage new believers from Islam to go and tell everyone immediately of their new faith. I have seen this to be counter-productive, both in the life of the believer and in his/her relationships with family and friends. When I first met A., who had professed faith through Correspondence Courses, he poured out a sad tale of continually deteriorating relationships with the other members of his family as he tried to share with them the news of Christ. He was obviously hoping that I had come to remove him from that uncomfortable situation and take him home with me. I listened sympathetically, then advised him to stop trying verbally to convince his family of the rightness of his new faith, to concentrate instead on being loving and helpful. I suggested that his family would likely be much more impressed by the positive transformation of his character and attitude in the home than they would be his efforts to convince them of the truth of the Gospel. Then I left, wondering whether I would ever see or hear of A. again. A few weeks later I received a letter from him, thanking me for my counsel, and testifying to a marked improvement in relationships with the family. "in fact," he said, "my brother has begun to read the Gospel, and would like to talk to you the next time you come.

I emphasize Matt. 5:13-16 as the first principle, encouraging the new believer to return to his family and social environment as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Neither of these crucial aspects of discipleship/relationship to the surrounding world is primarily dependent on verbal witness. Salt exercises its savoring influence quietly and unobtrusively, without being either seen or heard. Light exercises its beneficial influence in a very visible, but still non-verbal, manner. The emphasis is on "good works." I emphasize the testimony of transformation in attitudes, speech, actions, and reactions as prerequisite to verbal testimony of faith. This does not mean that we advocate a mere "presence witness." On the basis of 1 Peter 3:15,16, I teach that the testimony of life will prepare the way for effective testimony of lip. As family and friends notice the change in the life of the new believer, questions will be asked which will give a natural platform for sharing of the faith. This procedure has avoided the ostracism of new believers from their families and friends. And in a number of instances it has led to the subsequent conversion of other family members and/or friends. Ayachi had just professed faith and began enthusiastically sharing that fact with friends and family. The reaction was predictably negative. Ayachi was not firmly enough grounded in belief and character to weather the storm, and totally disappeared from the Christian scene.

Since the discipleship process emphasized relationships so as to build the cohesive and mutually edifying organic structures necessary to a viable church, believers will be learning during this process how to function as a body, even though they may not yet see themselves as a church.

At the same time, a process of forming leaders for the church will also be taking place. Discipling is the logical context in which leadership aspirations, qualities, and gifts will appear. As these become evident there is need for a more specialized training ministry concentrating on potential leadership. The discipleship ministry will be continued to all believers at the same time.

Leadership training should begin with the selection of a leadership team of two or more, depending on the size of the believing community and the number available for leadership. The church-planter should then spend the major part of his time with this team, while they increasingly assume major responsibility for discipling of others. This discipling, in fact, would be an integral part of their training.

The qualities which the New Testament requires in church leaders are outlined in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-8. Leadership training should concentrate on the inculcation of these qualities in order to form scripturally-qualified leaders. Leadership training is an active process, not merely a passive hope that some day we will discover someone in whom these qualities are evident.

The principles of the above-mentioned passages can be broken down into three categories of development in the leaders' lives, i.e. pastoral character (moral qualities), pastoral heart (attitudes), and pastoral skills (abilities). The Scriptures place a greater emphasis on character and attitudes than on knowledge and skills. Our leadership training should do the same.

One of the most critical steps in church-planting is the transfer of responsibility from the church-planter to the local leaders. Doing this too soon, too late, not at all, or in the wrong way may frustrate the emergence of a viable church.

The church-planter should provide occasion for each prospective elder to exercise each of the different responsibilities of an elder (teaching, preaching, counseling, organizing, disiplining, etc.), under his own guidance and supervision with subsequent evaluation. The phrase "not a novice" in 1 Tim. 3:6 indicates the necessity for previous practical experience before an individual begins to function officially as an elder.

During the process of leadership training the community of believers will have been meeting together in some manner. Providing opportunities for exercising the responsibilities will be greatly enhance by small house gatherings, each one needing the exercise of such leadership. This will provide natural rather than artificial situations.

A slight digression on the importance of house groups to the above-proposed leadership pattern may be helpful here. We have mentioned earlier that the size and type of believers' meetings should be that which will meet the corporate needs of worship and edification while at the same time being viable within the socio-cultural setting of the believing community.

As westerners, we tend to be too highly meeting-oriented and to push the believers too quickly into too highly-structured and formal church meetings. The normal pattern set in North Africa has been to gather believers as soon as possible into the expatriate church-planter's home for worship and edification meetings. As the group grows, the church-planter seeks increasingly to involve prospective national leaders in the administration of and ministry to the group. The long-range goal is that the group will someday transfer to national homes or to an independent meeting place under national leadership. I have seen this pattern to be largely self-defeating. Patterns such as hymn-singing are established which come to be regarded as essential to a church meeting, but are not reproducible in national homes under national leadership. National leaders tend to feel permanently inferior to the expatriate professional. Groups meeting in missionary homes have disintegrated upon the departure of the missionary . A notable exception may be the church in Algiers. From meeting in the Bonne Nouvelle, an independent meeting place, the church has apparently transferred successfully to meeting in several different national homes.

My own conviction is that the only viable future for the church in the Arab-Muslim world is a multiplicity of small house groups of from ten to twenty members. Experience indicates the wisdom of beginning church meetings in national homes under national leadership. This will both encourage quicker assumption of responsibility by national elders and avoid the necessity of eventual transfer of meeting place(s). So as to avoid calling premature and unnecessary attention to these home gatherings, I advocate that they be composed entirely of national believers. The normal elders of the church would then be the heads of the households in which the church met. The expatriate church-planter of church-planting team can have a significant input by individual and small-group discipleship and leadership-training sessions, while leaving the church group as such to meet on its own.

The culminating step in the establishment of a functioning autonomous local church is the investiture of the designated leaders with full responsibility and authority by some means acceptable to and recognized by all concerned (Acts 14:23). As low key and informal a designation as possible will lessen the vulnerability of the leaders in periods of intense opposition. Muslim authorities will be looking for the political implications of such a grouping of people, and will be concerned to discover the ringleaders. Formally-appointed leaders are more easily discovered and therefore in more jeopardy. Informal, relatively non-structured organization and leadership makes a church less vulnerable to hostile action against it. There must, however, be general recognition and acceptance within a church group of those who are in leadership.

Once local leadership is functioning, the church-planter would assume an advisory role, concentrating his prime efforts on the forming of a new church or churches. As Paul did with the churches of the New Testament, he should maintain his link with the just-established autonomous church by correspondence, occasional visits, and temporary delegates.

In the pattern suggested above, i.e. multiple house grouping forming the cellular structure of the local church, the relationship of the church-planter to that local church will be primarily with the leadership group ministering to those groupings, rather than with the house gatherings as such. This pattern should be established from the outset of the house meetings. This leadership core will then provide the chief liaison linking between groups, and will give the church-planter his prime opportunity for input to the church's being established on a sound scriptural basis. He should, however, be careful to let the house groupings with their national leaders decide matters concerning arrangements, furnishing of meeting rooms, and format of meetings.

The danger of fragmentation will always be present in a decentralized church such as we have proposed. Several measures can be taken to guard against this. The regular meeting of group leaders among themselves will foster a united family spirit among groupings. Visiting among members of different groups outside of meeting times should be strongly encouraged. Special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, or national holidays should be utilized to have larger gatherings comprising several smaller house groupings. Holding such gatherings on occasions such as those listed will place them in a culturally understandable and acceptable mold. They will therefore be much less risky to the Christian community. An occasional forest or beach party could also be a non-volatile setting for a larger gathering.