

Editorial: A New Chapter for Seedbed

By S.T. Antonio

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The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. (Isaiah 35:1)

Church planting at “the ends of the earth” requires wisdom borne out of community. The challenges of kingdom work in unreached places can be daunting, highlighting the need for the insights, perspectives, and push-back of our fellow laborers. But the nature and pressures of our work often conspire against the kind of careful, creative, and collaborative thinking needed to unravel the massive theological, cultural, and spiritual issues that confront us while church planting in hard places. The wisdom of the worker community is often untapped, due to our geographical isolation, security concerns, or our organizational/ideological silos.

Enter *Seedbed*, forum for practitioner conversations at “the ends of the earth.” Birthed in the North African desert, *Seedbed*—and its “Bulletin” predecessor—has a [fifty-year legacy](#) of facilitating a safe place for church planters to consult together in “crucial conversations” around high-stakes issues of discipleship and church-planting in unreached

communities. *Seedbed's* early decades were regionally focused in the Middle East and North Africa, with many rich practitioner discussions and debates over topics such as Arabic Bible translation, the Israel-Palestine conflict, contextualization, and Muslim discipleship. When Arab World Ministries joined forces with Pioneers in 2010, *Seedbed's* scope began gradually expanding to welcome a more diverse group of practitioners to the table. Since then, *Seedbed* began to feature practitioner reflections from throughout the Muslim world with a growing readership and contributors from a variety of organizations, with an intention to eventually expand further to those serving non-Muslim, unreached communities as well.

Three years ago, *Seedbed* was at a crossroads. After its last published issue in November 2017, outgoing editor Don Little stepped down. Simultaneously (and bearing no causal relation), the US office of Pioneers decided to discontinue publishing *Seedbed*. For the next two years, Don Little persisted in looking for a new editor and publishing home to take *Seedbed* forward in a new season. At the end of 2019, I was appointed to serve as the new editor, and to our delight, Arab World Media—which had previously published *Seedbed* when it was still “the Bulletin”—stepped up and offered to help relaunch *Seedbed* in a new format.

We entered a season of prayer and discernment as to how *Seedbed* could best serve and bless our readers—thinking practitioners inside and outside Pioneers striving to make disciples and multiply churches in least reached communities to the glory of God. Last year, my wife and I conducted a survey among our target audience that yielded over 250 respondents, sixty percent being *Seedbed* subscribers, and one third being from various organizations outside of Pioneers. As an incoming editor, this survey was a gold mine with important insights, a few highlights being:

- a strong preference for a digital format and positive support for a *Seedbed* website
- a strong preference for articles addressing biblical/theological issues, cultural issues, and ministry approaches

- a preference for retaining an issue-based format, with more frequent issues
- although many were generally aware of other mission journals and magazines, few read them on a frequent or regular basis
- what people have appreciated most about *Seedbed* has always been (a) its practitioner focus and relevance, (b) the depth and substance of its material, and (c) the diversity of perspectives
- an overwhelming affirmation of the need and value of *Seedbed*—people missed it and were excited that it was being relaunched

The result of this discernment and listening process was a new format for a new *Seedbed* era. I have made it a priority to honor and preserve the best of *Seedbed*'s rich legacy while creating space for new, impactful ways of cultivating practitioner conversation. Great effort was made to consider how we could make use of digital tools to facilitate a safe space for quality, robust dialogue without succumbing to the superficiality and toxicity of so much online discourse today.

The new *Seedbed* website offers a variety of features requested by our target audience. The site is simple and intuitive to navigate. It is secure and password-protected, with only carefully vetted members allowed access to its full content. Members will have access to decades of practitioner conversations in [Seedbed's archives](#)—categorized and fully searchable. (The past ten years of issues are now available, with the remainder to be uploaded in the coming months.) *Seedbed* members will be notified of new issues by email with a link to download or view the issue in a variety of electronic formats. Articles can be easily browsed and searched on the web, and favorites can be downloaded individually as PDFs. Members can easily submit feedback on a *Seedbed* issue, suggest an idea for an article, and write a letter to the editor directly through the website.

Seedbed, a publication of *Pioneers*, is a love gift to the practitioner community laboring to cultivate disciples and plant churches among unreached peoples to the glory of God. A child of the Arab desert, and

coming of age in Muslim ministry, *Seedbed* now invites to the table practitioners working in various regions and among different people groups—Muslim and non-Muslim. The goal is not generalized, context-less reflections, but the sharing of diverse, context-rich perspectives from a variety of places and communities, giving us fresh eyes and insights in the challenges into the particularities of our own context. All articles are tagged and categorized by region, and so those desiring region-specific articles (or a specific religious context) can easily locate them, including the rich history of Arab-world and Muslim-focused discussions from the early decades.

This is the first of two issues this year, the second scheduled for this fall. Our “relaunch issue” offers a number of reflections and reviews from current and former practitioners on a variety of topics, several of which are, in various ways, involved with properly distinguishing allies from enemies in the task to which we are called. Is online social media presence an opportunity or a liability in sensitive contexts? Can “Islam” be redeemable in our witness and discipleship? How do we discern and deal with the demonic in our discipleship efforts? Is church-planting “strategy” a holy opportunity or a worldly temptation? This issue offers some practitioner perspectives on these questions which may whet your appetite for deeper conversations around these topics.

The relaunching of *Seedbed* has been a team effort. Mark Cassidy and his team at Arab World Media have been instrumental in helping create a new home for *Seedbed*, and Danny Anan has made many of our dreams come true through his design wizardry on the website and the e-version. Pioneers International has offered crucial support and oversight. A special thanks to Dave Milligan and the trustees of Arab World Ministries International, who believed in *Seedbed* enough to offer a significant investment from the sale of the beloved Winchelsea House to help resurrect a journal that was previously published by AWM Central Services—we have indeed come full circle.

My wife, Jeanne, has been a stalwart support and tangible help in multiple ways, and I congratulate the members of our gifted team of practitioner-editors for their enthusiastic and excellent work on the relaunch issue. Outgoing editor, Don Little, deserves a special note of appreciation. He has generously offered me tireless support, encouragement, connections, ideas, and guidance throughout this entire process in more ways than I can count. Don's decade of gifted editorship helped make *Seedbed* the quality publication it is today, and his vision and foresight enabled Seedbed to continue in this new chapter. It is safe to say that without Don, there would be no "seeds" in this "*Seedbed*."

Church planting in unreached communities can be like gardening in the desert. Though humanly impossible, we keep on "gardening" because we serve a God who brings forth blossoms in the wilderness (Isa. 35:1). But such work requires deep roots in ourselves as well—roots of authentic faith and commitment which persistently seek after a growing wisdom and understanding of our Father, his kingdom ways, and the beloved image-bearers we are privileged to serve. *Seedbed* is a place for us to sow into one another and deepen our roots into Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), that we might more faithfully and fruitfully participate in the miraculous sprouting of the garden of God at the ends of the earth.