

Editorial: Indigenous Leader Formation: A Bird's-Eye View of the Issue

By S.T. Antonio

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“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders ...” (Titus 1:5)

When should we say a church has been “planted”? Put differently, when does a disciple-making movement become a church-planting movement? When two or three gather in the name of Jesus? When the Word is preached and baptism and communion practiced? When local groups claim their identity as the ekklesia of Jesus?

After touching on such questions in a [previous issue](#), *Seedbed* zeroes in on a critical, but neglected area of church formation—the formation of indigenous leaders. While it may not signal the birth of a church, the appointment of local elders as shepherds of Christ’s flock signals a significant milestone in the formation of the local church (Acts 14:23, Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5).

In frontier contexts, hard soil and intermittent progress often turns our focus away from leader/elder formation to what seems to be more pressing concerns: establishing identity and access, seed sowing, nurturing disciples, establishing groups. But is training qualified local leaders only for final stages of church formation? Or is it a critical dimension of discipleship which should be integrated into our disciple-making practice from the beginning?

In this issue, experienced church planters from diverse contexts and ministry approaches share insights from firsthand experience and research on mentoring indigenous leaders.

- A CPM leader from a Hindu background tells us in his own words how he raises up leaders in a multiplying network in South Asia. He discusses the challenge of illiteracy, the difference between his approach and that of Western workers, and the impact of the priesthood of all believers on his mentoring practice.
- A Taiwanese church planter shares a detailed, practical case study of raising up the first-ever elders in the first-ever church on an island in the South Pacific. He shares how they modeled biblical leadership in the pre-elder stage, prepared the elders-in-training, and navigated elder appointment and eventual exit.
- A female church planter in the Middle East champions the importance of equipping indigenous women leaders. Addressing the practical, cultural, and theological challenges involved, she gives actionable tips with anecdotes from her own experience mentoring women in an indigenous church plant in a conservative, least-reached community.
- A leading researcher of movements shares results from his firsthand study on leadership development in two CPMs in Asia. Honing in on the importance of different levels of leadership, this scholar-practitioner discusses differences in leadership training, the danger of “looking for the apostle,” and the importance of developing each person to reach their spiritual potential.

- In an interview with missiologist and Seedbed editor Dr. Gene Daniels, an experienced practitioner shares his story of walking alongside and mentoring leaders of movements. Advocating for a relational and Scripture-based approach to leadership development, this mentor shares how he navigates finances in the relationship, how he approaches confrontation, and why he avoids focusing on “methods.”
- An experienced church multiplier and current international director of Pioneers, Dr. Mark Syn discusses the topic of senior leader succession. How does a church-planting team identify, mentor, and effectively pass the baton to a godly, capable movement leader? Dr. Syn presents in-depth biblical and practical reflections from his experience of leader succession in South Asia.

In addition to several book reviews which further develop these themes, we continue the conversation from the previous issue in two areas:

- Julie Ma wrote, and subsequently [updated](#), an article interacting with Mark Durie’s writings in the context of Martin Accad’s SEKAP spectrum of Christian-Muslim dialogue. After a fruitful post-publication dialogue with Ma, Dr. Durie presents his response to several issues raised in her article, including several clarifications and a proposed revision of Dr. Accad’s SEKAP spectrum.
- The first ever *Seedbed* Symposium was held in July, an online conversation in response to the book review, *Through My Enemy’s Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine*. Co-author and Palestinian theologian Dr. Salim Munayer shared his story and answered questions in a deep dive into the roots of the ongoing conflict, his approach to Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, and his source of hope in the midst of war. In this issue, for *Seedbed* members, we publish the audio from this remarkable conversation.

Seedbed is committed to engaging difficult, controversial issues in a spirit of respectful, constructive dialogue, which builds up the body of Christ and sparks fresh insight for our disciple-making efforts among the least-reached. Expect to encounter diverse perspectives

and approaches, none of which are intended to officially represent the views of the *Seedbed* editors or any organization. Our articles hail from multiple organizations, contexts, and theological traditions, a diversity which we believe enhances and expands our collective wisdom as we aim to make Jesus known to all peoples.

May the Great Shepherd of the sheep equip each of us to faithfully shepherd the disciples in our care and to effectively unleash a multitude of indigenous, Christlike under-shepherds to strengthen and multiply his church among all nations.

Serving Jesus with you,

S.T. Antonio (for the Seedbed editorial team)