

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,