

INTRODUCTION

As part of the global church, we are called to fulfill the great commission and take the message of Christ to all peoples, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us.¹ How can we effectively fulfill this call without giving every community their own local church? A church where trained leaders can disciple and teach the congregation to multiply and seek to spread the gospel to other places?

In *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, David Hasselgrave states that “‘Make disciples’ is the sole imperative and the central activity enjoined in the Great Commission. To make converts and believers is certainly involved. But faith and discipleship can never be divorced.”² In order for new believers to be discipled and grow in their faith it is necessary that someone invests in these new converts lives and directs them to a solid Bible believing, Bible preaching congregation where they can be taught, encouraged and held accountable.

It is with this thought in mind that our strategy for church planting among the desperately poor is formed. Living Bread Ministries strives to plant churches in needy communities, meeting the needs of the residents both spiritually and physically, ministering to them as Jesus did.

To do so, it becomes imperative that we identify who the poor and needy are, as well as define poverty. In this church planting strategy we will visit these as well as identify the need for a foreign church planting organization to become involved with indigenous pastors in true partnership to see churches planted for the glory of Christ.

¹ Matthew 28:19-20, Holy Bible, English Standard Version, (Wheaton: Good News, 2001).

² David Hasselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, (Grand Rapids: 2000), 21.

Reaching the poor and needy

As the body of Christ, we are to continue Jesus' ministry among the poor and needy through word and deed. The poor and marginalized cannot be ignored. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus clearly states His mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." We must continue to take the gospel to all places and we must continue to reach the poor in the name of Christ.

There is an understanding that the "typical" Christian around the world has changed. In his book *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*, David Livermore states that today, "the 'typical' Christian in the world is a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian *favela*. The vast majority of Christians are young, nonwhite, poor, theologically conservative and female."³ If this is the picture of the "typical" Christian more needs to be done to reach this demographic.

Who are the poor and what is poverty?

In North America we tend to think of the poor as the "have-nots," those lacking material possessions. However, poverty is much deeper than that, especially in the Majority World (poor and less developed countries). Being poor in these countries sometimes mean not having an identity; being seen as worthless and useless.

³ David A. Livermore, *Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, (Grand Rapids: 2006), 31.

Poverty can be defined in many different ways, all of which are interwoven. Poverty is lack of material things: food, housing, and land. It is being humiliated and vulnerable to rudeness and ill treatment. Poverty is lack of infrastructure. Poverty is being victim to treatable and curable illnesses. It is being illiterate, an outcast, and an outsider in one's own culture.⁴

The World Bank, an institution that seeks to alleviate poverty, conducted a study in the 1990s in which they asked over sixty thousand people living in poverty, what it meant to be poor. The results were published in a collection called *Voices of the Poor*. One of the many poor interviewed stated that "For a poor person everything is terrible – illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of."⁵ This statement clearly presents the true multifaceted reality of poverty.

Consider the definitions of many others interviewed:

Poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help. –Latvia 1998

When I leave for school in the mornings I don't have any breakfast. At noon there is no lunch, in the evening I get a little supper, and that is not enough. So when I see another child eating, I watch him, and if he doesn't give me something I think I'm going to die of hunger. –A 10-year-old child, Gabon 1997

The rich have one permanent job; the poor are rich in many jobs. –Pakistan 1996

Poverty is lack of freedom, enslaved by crushing daily burden, by depression and fear of what the future will bring. –Georgia 1997

[Poverty is] to come home and see your children hungry and not have anything to give them. –Brazil 1995

... a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to make themselves heard. –Cameroon 1995⁶

⁴ Deepa Narayan and others, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?*, (New York:2000), 31-32.

⁵ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting The Poor...And Ourselves*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 52.

⁶ Narayan, *Voices of the Poor*, 30, 35, 36, 37, 39.

The above definitions clearly broaden the average person's understanding of what poverty is and who the poor really are. These definitions only scratch the surface on the issue of poverty as poverty takes different meanings and different faces based on gender, age, ethnicity, race and location. Narayan summarizes well the hard to break, vicious cycle of poverty:

Poor people remain poor because they are excluded from access to the resources, opportunities, information, and connections the less poor have. For poor people in developing countries this translates into intergenerational poverty. In addition, poverty is socially stigmatized, making it even harder for poor people to gain access to the networks and resources they need for survival.⁷

In the *favelas*, where our churches are being planted, the above quotes describe the mindset of most of the residents. As we seek to serve in these communities, it is imperative that we fully understand this deeply rooted negative self image. When we minister to the poor from a position of wealth and power (haves vs. have-nots) we only serve to perpetuate this negative image. If we are not careful our sincere attempts to minister to them will result in causing more harm than good.

Ministering to the poor involves more than a handout. At times, ministering to the poor is as simple as sharing a meal with them, having a conversation where their thoughts and opinions are heard and appreciated. They need to be included and feel needed in their own church and community.

Why a foreign agency?

Working among the poor in a Majority World country brings many challenges for missionaries/church planters. In 2004, when we began Living Bread Ministries, we met and

⁷ Ibid, 241.

interviewed several pastors and lay leaders in Brazil who had a heart for working with the very poor. The common denominator in these conversations was finances. We learned that it is common for local missions agencies and sending churches to only provide income for the pastor/missionary, but no resources to minister with. These workers must either use their limited resources for ministry or campaign for funding on their own.

The cost of living in Brazil is high when compared to the earning power. The current minimum wage is US\$201.00 per month,⁸ while the cost to rent a one bedroom apartment in the capital city of Porto Alegre (state of Rio Grande do Sul) is US\$140.00 per month. If a missionary/pastor is to use his own resources to do ministry, by the time his basic needs are met there is not much left (if any). Some of the pastors we spoke with told us that there were times in their ministry when they had to choose between meeting their own family's needs or do ministry.

As a result, the majority of church planting efforts are focused on the middle to upper class communities. The residents of these communities are, in turn, able to financially fund the church plant and subsequently fully support an established church.

Although the poor in the slums are not normally considered an unreached people group, because of the above factors they remain for the most part unreached. We've met many in the slums who have never even heard the name of Jesus, and many more who's only knowledge of Jesus is in an animistic context.⁹

Another difficulty to reaching the poor in Latin America is the discrimination between social classes. We have found churches that do outreach to the poor and needy in the slums,

⁸ Bloomberg, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=akSGZ5jSNeN0&refer=latin_america (accessed 24 June 2010)

⁹ "Animism (Latin *anima* meaning 'soul') is the belief that within all creatures and objects (natural and manufactured) there exists a soul... Animistic religions sometimes offer sacrifices of various types in order to appease these spirits. Matthew J. Slick, *What is Animism?*, (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry. 1995 – 2010), <http://www.carm.org/questions/about-philosophy/what-animism> (accessed 24 June 2010).

however because of the stigma between social classes those from the poor communities rarely return to attend regular services, usually because they know they will not be welcomed nor will they feel comfortable through the stares of judgmental eyes.

In his book *To Give or Not To Give?*, John Rowell describes a biblically based “guide” for global Christian stewardship. He states that “when we fully embrace the value of national workers, perhaps we will more fairly fund them as well.”¹⁰ The Church in the West has been blessed financially; it is time that the Western Church begins to invest in God called, capable men to reach their own people with the Gospel. By investing in national (indigenous) pastors, we are not only enabling them to reach their own people, but we reduce the time and use of resources that would have been spent on language and culture training. We are also reducing the risk of non-adaptation of Western missionaries who are not accustomed to deal with the extreme situations most often found in the slums.

Rowell also speaks of the advantages of offering support specifically to those men who are called to ministry who come out of those very communities:

Honor should be extended to those from among the poor who have demonstrated their passion for God in the midst of impoverished conditions. They should be affirmed for their survival skills, which were developed long before supposedly more spiritually mature missionaries entered the scene. They knew how to live in harsh conditions before we ever came along! They possess contextual and cultural expertise that far exceeds our own. And they have their own “kingdom vision” for their own people. It should be our role to serve rather than to supplant that vision.¹¹

It is our desire to support such man God raises to reach the poor and needy in the *favelas* throughout Latin America.

¹⁰ John Rowell, *To Give or Not To Give? Rethinking Dependency, Restoring Generosity, & Redefining Sustainability*, (Atlanta: 2006), 138.

¹¹ Rowell, *To Give or Not To Give?*, 140.

The vision of Living Bread Ministries

Living Bread was born out of a deep burden for the poor, a burden that started in 1992. In 2004, after a year spent in prayer seeking God's direction, LBM was established. In 2005 we began our first church plant in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Today we have planted five churches among the desperately poor in that city and will be launching our sixth church plant in July 2010.

LBM exists to glorify Jesus Christ as we plant churches among the poor and needy, and equip these churches to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and deed. The love of Christ is being displayed through outreach ministries, fulfilling the words of Christ in Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was hungry and you gave me food...I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me,..." More than 25,000 pounds of food have been distributed, thousands of meals have been served, blankets and warm clothing have been given out and other needs are being met such as medicines, school supplies and hygiene items.

Porto Alegre is the capital of the southernmost state of Brazil. The population of the city is approximately 1.4 million (4.8 million in the greater metropolitan area) inhabitants, of which 24% (over 340,000) live in extreme poverty.¹² Our churches are planted in the midst of the *favelas* or slums of Porto Alegre where the majority of these 340,000 people are living.

According to the lead IMB (International Mission Board) missionary in the state, the city of Porto Alegre has less than a 0.3% Evangelical presence. Also, the Brazilian Baptist Convention states that there are 30,000 registered *Macumba* centers (a type of animism including sorcery, ritual dances and sacrifices). In the slums, the Evangelical presence is even smaller and animism is prevalent.

¹² IBGE, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. <http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat/topwindow.htm?1> (accessed 20 February 2010).

Church Planting Strategy

As part of our strategy, we established a Brazilian Non Governmental Organization (NGO) called Ministério Pão Vivo (MPV). MPV is a sister ministry of Living Bread Ministries and the umbrella under which we operate in Brazil, allowing Living Bread, the Western organization, to stay behind the scenes. Ministério Pão Vivo is a Brazilian led ministry that has as Executive Director a Brazilian national missionary with over 30 years experience in church planting.

Our Brazilian leadership isolates a community and finds potential church planters. Together, LBM and MPV develop an entrance plan into this community. We then call a church planter and equip him with the training, accountability and financial resources he will need to reach the target community. The church planter and the church plant, including outreach ministries like feeding programs, are funded by Living Bread Ministries and Ministério Pão Vivo. This interdependency between both organizations is unusual in global missions, especially when it involves a Western organization. Many organizations speak of the advantages of using indigenous pastors, however, very few are willing to give them financial resources and empower them to be true partners in ministry.

Once the new community has been identified and a church planter called, he begins the process of evangelism in the neighborhood. Different evangelism strategies may be used at first. The church planter will then isolate a home to begin weekly Bible studies and special events in the community will be planned to reach them. Through these events we promote partnerships with our other church plants where the members from one needy community will travel to the new target area to hold a feeding ministry or other type of activity. This is a great opportunity to

get our church plants involved in local missions, empowering and encouraging them to serve God's kingdom regardless of their social or financial status. They too are part of the Global Church and can have an impact for Christ.

Although each new church plant will follow this basic strategy, their ministries will vary. We encourage each church to seek to meet the needs of the community they are in. They all have some type of feeding and clothing ministry, but the details of how and what are left to the pastor's prerogative. The idea is that the church becomes the place people will come with their needs, whether it be food, clothing or medicine, eliminating the need for a humanitarian organization that will meet the physical needs and neglect the spiritual.

I venture to say that Living Bread Ministries church planting strategy mirrors the Pauline Cycle.¹³ Hasselgrave poses the question "Is Pauline Strategy Applicable Today?"¹⁴ in his book *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*. My answer, like his, is yes! I would go further to say that not only it is applicable but it is the most effective church planting strategy.

Through this model, we have not only been able to successfully plant churches among the poor, but we are seeing the Lord use Ministério Pão Vivo as a church planting movement among Brazilians. LBM and MPV are true partners in ministry and we are now seeing the fruits of this partnership. Today, about 15% of MPV's annual operating budget including the church plants is being met by Brazilian partners (churches and individuals).

Our long term vision is to see Ministério Pão Vivo leading the Brazilian church to plant churches among the poor and needy all over Brazil and beyond. This will be done through the

¹³ The Pauline Cycle can be summarized as 1. Missionaries commissioned (Acts 13:1-4; 15:39-40) 2. Audience contacted (Acts 13:14-16; 14:1; 16:13-15) 3. Gospel communicated (Acts 13:17-41; 16:31) 4. Hearers converted (Acts 13:48; 16:14-15) 5. Believers congregated (Acts 13:43) 6. Faith confirmed (Acts 14:21-22; 15:41) 7. Leadership consecrated (Acts 14:23) 8. Believers commended (Acts 14:23; 16:40) 9. Relationships continued (Acts 15:36; 18:23) 10. Sending churches convened (Acts 14:26-27; 15:1-4). Hasselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 47-48.

¹⁴ Ibid, 44.

interdependent relationship of Living Bread Ministries and Ministério Pão Vivo, where both ministries share the financial burdens and provide leadership, resources and accountability.

Conclusion

It is my hope that through this church planting strategy, the reader can better comprehend the command from Christ and the need to reach the poor, not only in Latin America but throughout the world. It is my hope that the reader will also have a better understanding of who the poor are, and hopefully make an impact in how he/she views them.

Living Bread Ministries is an organization that uses funding from North American partners to fund national pastors who have a heart and desire to reach the poor in their own country for Christ. To borrow the words of John Rowell, LBM is an organization engaged in a covenant relationship with indigenous missionaries, where we work “as brothers and sisters in covenant rather than as partners in a contractual relationship... We walk as brothers and sisters, coequal children of one heavenly Father, serving a mutually agreed-upon agenda.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Rowell, *To Give or Not To Give?*, 156-157.

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