

GRASSROOTS PASTORAL TRAINING CAN MULTIPLY CHURCHES

George Patterson and Galen Currah
From *Indian Journal of missiology*, Spring 2000

More than thirty years of helping churches to multiply in several countries has taught us the importance of obeying carefully the instructions that Jesus gave to us, and of following the example of his apostles. We are convinced that most Christians can, together, increase "30, 60 or 100-fold". Certainly, the rapid growth of the world's population, the growing opposition from anti-christian forces, and Jesus' promise of world evangelisation (Mt. 24:14), argue for new, affordable, effective means to reproduce churches through multiplying pastors.

Recently, careful research done by Schwarz (*Natural Church Development*) in 32 countries and by Neumann (*Home Groups For Urban Cultures*) in India and elsewhere, has shown that churches can multiply in all kinds of cultures. To do so, rapidly multiplying churches must start and maintain a grassroots training programme to ensure a steady supply of new pastors. Scripture and ministry experience suggest the following six practices that can will help train grassroots pastors in most places.

1. God says to be take grassroots pastoral training to where the people are.

2 Chronicles 17 records how King Jehoshaphat commissioned officers to go, teach the Book of the Law throughout all Judah, so that no one was deprived of God's Word. No one had to move to Jerusalem to attend an expensive academy to learn the Scriptures.

And when did Jesus or his apostles ever command Christians to build institutions that limit pastoral training to those who reach a certain academic level and can afford to leave jobs and families to study? We recognise the value of formal theological institutions and even teach in a seminary, but we deny that a school is the only way, or the best way, to train pastors.

Churches are weakened when they hinder the type of pastoral training that Jesus and His apostles modelled and commanded. Churches must not limit training to institutions that are beyond the reach of most of those whom God has gifted to serve as pastors. "Wisdom calls aloud in the street" (Pro. 1:20). The words of enlightenment are not to be hidden inside temples where only monks can study them. Pastoral training, in New Testament times, was freely available to all who needed it and was not confined to institutions.

Pastors and Christian workers who get trained in an institution often hold a low view of the church, supposing that educated persons and para-church organisations can train others and do the ministry better than can churches. Yet it is usually pastors who have an high view of the church and its ability to train Christians, that have stronger churches that grow.

Discussion question: How can your church or school help pastoral students maintain a high view of the church and its God-given potential?

2. Grassroots pastoral training acts by the authority it gets from Christ.

In his parable of the house on the rock (Matt. 7:24), Jesus said that wise folks hear his words and act on them. In his final commandment, recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, and Jesus said disciple-making derives its authority from Him. By his divine authority, we are to teach others to obey everything he commanded. Jesus is the Rock, the foundation for all teaching and ministry. Loving, child-like obedience to his commands is the only way to build on this Rock. Christians make disciples by teaching them to obey Jesus' commands.

That is what the apostles did. The 3,000 new believers, who made up the first Christian church, as recorded in Acts 2:41-47, are seen obeying all of Jesus basic commands. Good pastoral training builds on this foundation of obedience to Jesus. The church's foundation is not a set of doctrines; it is

our trust and obedience to our King and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Biblical doctrine and all ministries build on this foundation of loving obedience, becoming the upper storeys of the building, the second and third stories and on up forever. Christians will spend all eternity learning about God. But they must begin at the bottom, like little children, yielded to him who said, "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Discussion question: What are the basic commands of Jesus, that all converts obeyed at once in Acts 2? (The command to love is seen in the things they did for each other.)

3. Grassroots pastoral training is immediately applied to the lives of the flocks that students shepherd.

Neither Jesus nor his apostles followed a standard curriculum or traditional classrooms to teach courses. Rather they would listen first to their learners' flocks' needs and ministry opportunities, and would then teach them what they needed to learn.

Jesus said that a good teacher "is like the owner of a house who brings out from his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matt. 14:52). A good pastoral trainer has a "storeroom" (knowledge and experience) from which he draws various resources, according to the needs of pastoral students' flocks. We do not condemn using classrooms, as we explained earlier, but insist that formal education must be balanced with on-the-job training, as seen in the New Testament.

A good trainer must first listen to pastoral student's report about how his flock—church, cell or home group—is doing. The trainer will then assign studies that correspond to the need or opportunity (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The student's church or group may at first be his own family or a few friends, but he must have a flock to which to make the training applicable and meaningful. If he does not apply the training at once, then he will become another "hearer only", which James 1:22 condemns.

A good grassroots training programme will provide the pastoral trainer with a list of (a) all the commands of Jesus, (b) all the ministries that the New Testament requires of a church, and (c) all key biblical doctrines. Bible passages should be taught that support the trainee's church activities, not only as biblical information. Over time, a pastoral student will learn and teach the whole list.

At each meeting with his trainer, the pastoral student reports on what his church is doing, on any problems, and on ministry opportunities. With his trainer's coaching, he plans what his people will do next, selecting from the list those activities and studies that correspond to the plan. (One such training programme available in many languages is called *Train & Multiply*TM. Visit the T&MTM web site at www.TrainAndMultiply.com)

Discussion questions: What are some of the ministries that the New Testament requires of every church? Which of those ministries does your church need to do better?

4. Grassroots pastoral training prepares not only preachers but shepherds who know how to equip their people for ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-16 reveals the purpose of *teaching* in God's church; it is to train all members of the body of Christ for to serve each other in love for their mutual edification, using their different spiritual gifts. A good shepherd learns to recognise the spiritual gifts of everyone in his flock, and helps each one to serve others. As a flock finds ways to put into practice the "one another" commands of the New Testament, the spiritual gifts of each one will become easy to recognise.

When a church has more than one flock of believers, each flock should have a shepherd or pastor, and those shepherds should remain for a few months under the guidance of an "elder", that is, a more experienced and wise shepherd or pastor. The elder can help each shepherd to find ways to equip their flocks' members. Pastoral students can also advise one another.

Discussion questions: What is the difference between a mere preacher and a shepherd? What does the shepherd enable his people to do?

5. In grassroots pastoral training, more experienced pastors train newer ones.

2 Timothy 2:2 requires the setting up of disciple-making chains. Every true pastor teaches, gives spiritual care, organises ministries, and oversees his flock. Yet God intends that pastors also continually train new pastors. In the Bible, pastors are called 'elders' who shepherd small groups of people. No church buildings were mentioned in church history until the final quarter of the third century. Christians used to meet in homes and were led by shepherding elders who continually trained newer shepherds on the job.

Neither the church in Jerusalem nor the church in Ephesus was one large congregation, but both were a cluster of small groups meeting in homes to learn the Word of Christ and to break bread. Those small groups were not simply Bible studies or fellowship groups; they were tiny churches within a larger church. They had to keep on enabling many new pastors to receive training, so that the little churches could multiply rapidly, adding on new churches.

Discussion question: How could your church organise itself to give more new leaders experience in shepherding small groups? How can you help home groups to be real, tiny churches that obey all of Jesus' commands?

6. Grassroots pastoral training lets the Holy Spirit harmonise it with the other gift-based ministries.

According to 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit harmonises the several gift-based ministries in the church body. Therefore pastoral training must not be divorced from evangelism, church planting and shepherding. Jesus and his apostles combined all these ministries into one body, so that separate organisations are not required to make them happen. A well-shepherded church will accomplish more evangelism than will an evangelistic band; a well-trained church will counsel more needy folks than will a counselling ministry; and a well-organised church will provide for more practical needs that will a relief agency.

Discussion questions: How can you avoid creating two separate programs, one for training pastors and another for starting or shepherding congregations? How could you maintain a biblical relationship, as seen in 1 Corinthians 12, between those who train pastors and those with other ministries in the body?

Conclusion. While it is true that most small groups do not have all the spiritual gifts, for there are too few Christians in a small group, a group that multiplies to become several tiny churches will have all the spiritual gifts it needs to do the work of Christ in its place. And while there is a biblical role for missionary bands, your church has all the resources promised by Jesus Christ to multiply itself and minister to its members and to its community. To keep your church growing, you must ensure that it has a programme of continual grassroots pastoral training.

END