

The Importance of the Five Roles and the Movement Strengthening Strategist in Networks of Multiplying Churches

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As I watched large numbers of believers and churches emerge among Muslims in Indonesia and among Hindus in India, it became clear to me that choosing to be for or against a “movement” was not the issue. If we believe that God can do anything, including bringing about a new work among people groups formerly hostile to the gospel, who was I to question that? Amazing new work emerged among Muslims and Hindus because God opened the hearts of formerly hostile people to place their faith in Him. The question for our missionary teams was, “What will we do to keep up with the pace that God chooses to move among a people group?”

One of the central, and right, concerns expressed over multiplying churches during the past twenty-five years has been the lack of leadership training available in those networks of churches. In this article, I will address that issue and offer suggestions to overcome this deficiency. I advocate for an approach that gives attention to planting healthy churches sustained over time amid networks of multiplying churches, with particular focus on

raising up a “Movement Strengthening Strategist” to help with leadership development.

How is it possible to train pastors and teachers within multiplying churches in such a way that the number of pastors and teachers keeps pace with the multiplication of churches? If churches begin multiplying, the missionary should want to find ways to keep pace with the movement and not slow the movement of people coming to faith and churches being formed—all the while aiming to develop healthy churches as God sovereignly saves unbelievers.

This is not a new topic of discussion among missiologists and field practitioners. In the 1890s, a disagreement arose among the missionaries in Uttar Pradesh, India, regarding whether to slow a movement down to adequately teach all those who had been baptized or continue to facilitate the growth of the movement.¹ As the U. P. Mission struggled over this issue and continued to develop their strategy, Robert Stewart argued,

And again, some express the conviction that they ought not to baptize any more applicants for baptism than they are able to afterwards to train properly or care for—in other words, keep Christ’s lambs out of the fold until that fold is enlarged and put in order, so that every member of the flock can be systematically fed and nicely housed—as if these lambs would not do better in the church than in the world anyhow, however imperfect the former might be, or as if the Lord would make a mistake in regenerating people too fast and would not, in His providence and by His grace, make abundant provision for the spiritual nourishment and the highest welfare of all His new-born children.²

¹ Frederick Stock and Margaret Stock, *People Movements in the Punjab* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 105.

² Robert Stewart, *Life and Work in India: An Account of the Conditions, Methods, Difficulties, Results, Future Prospects and Reflex Influence of Missionary Labor in India, especially in the*

Fred Stock, in his book about the same work, *People Movements in the Punjab*, asserts that “quantity, rather than reducing quality, was used by God’s Spirit to create a vital growing fellowship so essential to spiritual depth.”³ Stock affirms that God is interested in numerical growth and that “we are called not just to be faithful, but to win people.”⁴ The goal, according to Stock, should be quality *and* quantity. He argues that “God is not content with a few highly polished ‘quality’ Christians, but opens His arms to gather in all who will come.”⁵

When a God-ordained network of multiplying churches emerges among a people group, we must do all we can to keep pace with how the Lord is moving among formerly lost peoples. At the same time, however, it is incumbent on the apostolic leader—defined here not as an equivalent to the original twelve apostles, but as one whose “main function . . . is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others”⁶—to make certain that leaders are being trained within newly planted churches. To not raise up leaders is often to leave behind works that do not last. In order to train leaders, we must tap into the people gifts and roles given to the church that the apostle Paul clearly articulates in Ephesians 4:11-13.

The Five Roles (Ephesians 4:11)

Scholars such as Harold Hoehner, Wayne Grudem, Clinton Arnold, and Eckhard Schnabel affirm the ongoing role of the apostles, prophets, evangelists,

Punjab Mission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (Philadelphia, PA: Pearl, 1896, accessed on April 1, 2022 Google Books), 221.

³ Stock, *People Movements*, 219.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Kindle Location 11051). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

shepherds, and teachers in our day.⁷ Over the past several years, a body of literature has emerged advocating a focus on the fivefold gift mix of Ephesians 4:11. Some call it APEST (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher), and others the “fivefold” ministry, or “5Q.”⁸ Missionary practitioners and contemporary authors such as Neil Cole, Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim, Michael Frost, J.R. Woodward, and Dan White have also made contributions toward encouraging all these gifts to flourish in local churches.⁹

For purposes of this article, I will use the nomenclature “five roles” for these gifts. I believe that it is ideal to have all five roles on the church planting team, especially once churches begin to multiply among a people group. Raising up these leaders takes time, however, and it usually occurs in stages. The apostolically-gifted worker desiring sustainability of churches within a network of multiplying churches must also focus on mobilizing missionaries with other gifts to sustain the emerging churches within that network. For example, missionaries with giftings such as shepherding and teaching are needed to train local pastors and teachers to lead the newly emerging churches.

⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 540-47; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 119; Clinton E. Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 257-59; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 847; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 237.

⁸ See, for example, “5Q” (<https://5qcentral.com>).

⁹ Neil Cole, *Primal Fire: Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus* (Bonita Springs, FL: Tyndale, 2014), 32-54; Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 42; Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (Colombia, B.C.: 100 Movements, 2017), 93-125; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Inc., 2003), 165-181; J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr., *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 46-51.

In South Asia, I also advocated for a new role called the Movement Strengthening Strategist (MSS) to solve the church leadership development problem. This role is not the equivalent of any of the roles listed in Ephesians 4, and I do not intend to suggest I am adding a sixth role to the inspired list; in fact, most MSS team members I know tend to lean toward the pastor and teacher roles.

The Five Roles in Networks of Multiplying Churches

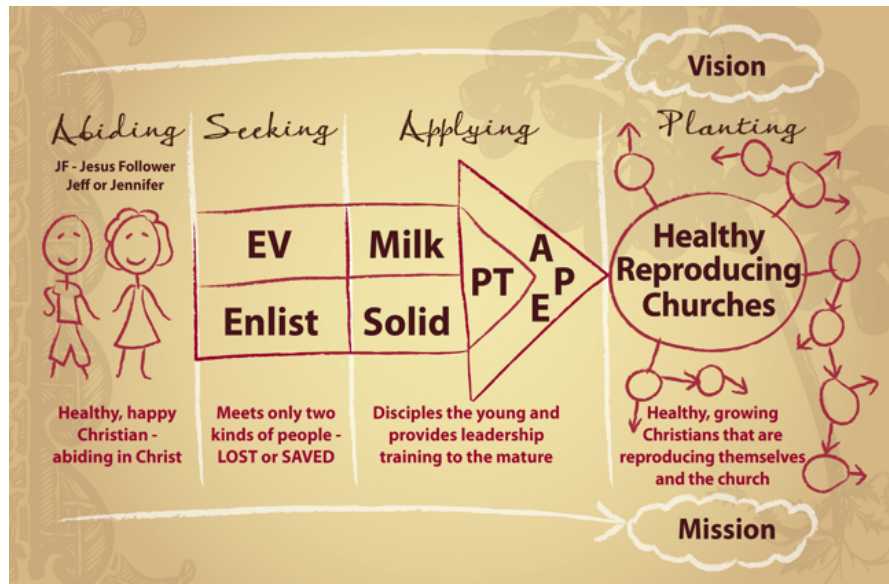
The five roles in Ephesians 4:11 need to be examined more closely to determine the part they play in the growth and health of the network of multiplying churches. To keep this in the forefront of our thinking, we in the ASAP affinity developed a simple strategy with a plan including all five roles. The ASAP diagram provided field leaders with a tool to evaluate strategy plans that new team leaders developed.

The plan, known as the ASAP Plan (Abiding, Seeking, Applying & Planting), included Ephesians 4:11 in the diagram, pointing out the need to identify and develop people in every church around the five roles found in the verse: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

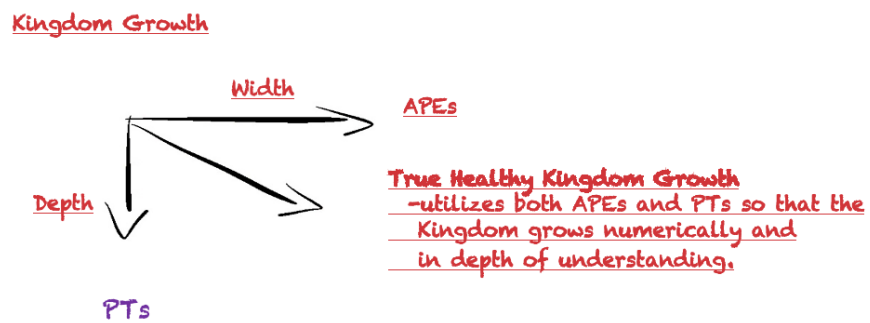
Through our work in the field, we found that apostles, prophets, and evangelists (APEs) keep pushing the movement further and wider while pastors and teachers (PTs) continue to deepen the health of the churches within the movement.¹⁰ The key is holding both perspectives in tension so that one does not overpower the other. The balance between the urgent breadth of gospel sowing and the necessary depth in healthy churches must be sought and maintained. Those five roles serving in concert with one another thus look like this on the field:¹¹

¹⁰ Brad Roderick, ed., "ASAP: A Training Manual," (April 29, 2010), 1-194. The ASAP plan was developed by the Affinity of South Asia Leadership Team and included a simple diagram and a Manual of tools and resources for use in the field.

¹¹ C. Wilson and J. Houk, "Foundations for Emerging Leaders: A Guide for Long-term Discipleship in New Churches" (Unpublished Training Materials, January 2017), 1-45. This



ASAP Plan



Healthy Kingdom Growth

The Role of the Apostle

Missiologist and practitioner Don Dent affirmed God's ongoing gift of the apostle in the initial stages of church planting, saying the apostle is the initiator for spreading the gospel and planting multiple, reproducing churches among unreached people groups.¹² The function of modern-day apostles is closely aligned with their name which means, "one who is sent with a message," with the emphasis on the message. As Hoehner concluded, the main function of the apostle is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others.¹³ Modern-day apostles are closer to what many Christians refer to as church planters or church-planting missionaries. The church is carrying out the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20) when the sovereign Lord commissions and empowers missionaries to go and proclaim good news, establish churches, and teach the disciples to obey all that the Lord commands.

Amid a network of multiplying churches, the apostolic leader keeps the breadth and depth of the church planting task in view. He knows that new believers need to be discipled, leaders need to be trained, and the work needs to move forward into new territory. These apostolic leaders pay attention to the overall health of the churches that are emerging amid these networks of new churches.¹⁴ Through prayer and collaboration with his team, the leader knows when to move the work forward among new people groups or expand

section will include portions of the materials included in this forty-five-page training manual.

¹² Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation* (Edinburgh, U.K.: WestBow Press, 2019), 2.

¹³ Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Kindle Location 11051).

¹⁴ Nathan Shank, "Generational Mapping: Tracking Elements of Church Formation within CPMs," 26-30. One way to track the health of churches within a network of multiplying churches is to track each church through generational church mapping. Nathan Shank has been a pioneer in North India in applying generational mapping to networks of churches to determine the health and growth of multiplying churches. By doing this the apostolic leader can see not only the big picture of how churches are multiplying in a network, but also how healthy individual churches are.

the work among people groups where disciples and churches are already multiplying.

The Role of the Prophet

What is the role of the modern-day prophet in a network of emerging churches? In no way should we affirm a modern-day prophet speaking a word from the Lord at the same level of inspiration as an Old Testament prophet.¹⁵ Paul enumerates this gift in three other locations where he lists spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30). According to Paul, a prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God to strengthen, encourage, and comfort believers (1 Cor. 14:3) as well as to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:4-5).

This gift provides encouragement in the churches being planted, especially in areas of “intense opposition.”¹⁶ Although the work of the prophet is primarily to encourage believers (1 Cor. 14:22), Paul also explains that God can reveal the secrets of the heart of an unbeliever through prophecy, which results in that person turning and following Christ (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Even though Jesus warns of false prophets (Matt. 24:24), Paul confronts a false prophet (Acts 13:6-11), and Peter and John warn the church of false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1), Paul also exhorts the Thessalonians “not to despise prophetic utterances” (1 Thess. 5:20-22). Paul encourages the Thessalonians to discern that which is good and that which is false or evil (1 Thess. 5:21-22). Paul teaches that the gift of prophecy ought to be eagerly sought due to its ability to edify the community of believers (1 Cor. 14:1).

The role of the prophet within a network of emerging churches might serve multiple purposes. As new disciples are made from people who come

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 161-3. Stott argues that prophets of the canonical kind that received a word from the Lord, are no longer active today. As Stott claims, “nobody can claim an inspiration comparable to that of the canonical prophets, or use the introductory formula, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’”

¹⁶ Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 431.

to Christ from non-Christian backgrounds, they need someone who can speak truth to them regarding their old way of life. For example, someone might be hanging on to an idol in their home that ought to be cast out. The prophet may point out the gap between the mature man of God mentioned in Ephesians 4:13 and the childish believer tossed back and forth by the waves described in Ephesians 4:14. By doing so, the prophet helps new believers and churches grow and mature so that they, in turn, can make disciples in their community and beyond.

The Role of the Evangelist

Runners in ancient times delivered the good news of a military victory or an emperor ascending to the throne. Ambassadors brought home good news of diplomatic victories.¹⁷ Much more importantly, angels brought good news of Jesus' birth to earth (Luke 1:19). Jesus traveled around Judea and Galilee proclaiming the good news (Luke 4:43, 8:1; Matt. 4:23, 9:35). All evangelists share the good news, while some travel to do so. Jesus' disciples are to take the good news everywhere (Mark 13:10, 14:9; Matt. 24:14, 26:13; Luke 9:6).

The gospel of peace with God through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Eph. 1:13, 2:17, 3:6, 8, 6:15, 19; 1 Cor 15:3-4) is the message that evangelists share. Even though all Christians are enjoined to share the gospel, there is a special gift endowed upon some in the area of evangelism.¹⁸ It may be expressed in several different ways such as being a gifted evangelistic preacher, explaining the gospel clearly to unbelievers, helping people place their faith in Christ, or engaging in personal evangelism in an effective way.¹⁹

¹⁷ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 274.

¹⁸ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 163; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 359. Schreiner argues that evangelists are "especially endowed by God for the dissemination of the gospel." Schreiner states that those who have the gift of evangelism should be committed to that ministry.

¹⁹ Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 163.

Evangelists are not limited to itinerant preaching, as many are working within established congregations. Paul served as an evangelist and encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:5). Philip, one of the seven chosen by the apostles to serve the widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:3-6), is called “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8).

In addition to personally proclaiming the gospel, evangelists equip others for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). Practically, the work of the evangelist may cover a wide range of activities like planting churches, training Christians, and strengthening established churches, but his primary role is evangelizing and equipping others to do the same.

The Role of the Pastor/Shepherd

The term “pastor” is rare in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:11 is the only place *poimen* (pastor/shepherd) is used to describe the work of a church leader. Thielman states that “in Ephesians 4:11 the pastors were probably leaders within the Christian communities who held positions of authority and were charged with the community’s well-being.”²⁰

The shepherding role for a leader is affirmed as Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). Some characteristics of shepherding that Jesus pointed out are (1) knowing people personally and intimately (John 10:3, 14), (2) leading them well (John 10:4), (3) protecting them from thieves, robbers, and wolves (John 10:7-13), (4) and loving them so much that one would sacrifice their life for them, unlike the hired hand who runs away when trouble comes (John 10:11-13, 15).

Jesus extended that role to Peter and the other disciples when he commissioned Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17). Paul also refers to elders as shepherds in Acts 20:28. Shepherds are supposed to help the flock discern and avoid dangerous teaching that comes by way of wolves (Acts 20:28-29).

²⁰ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276.

In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter also encourages the leaders who give oversight to be good shepherds of the flock of God: “Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly” (CSB).

Within a network of multiplying churches, it is vital to be training local shepherds and caring for the many new sheep who are entering the kingdom at the same time. The missionary church planter or the MSS should therefore shepherd the maturing shepherds, not the sheep. The MSS particularly raises up and equips local shepherds to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12), and that work includes caring for the sheep. If local shepherds are not raised up, the movement may grow dependent on outsiders and thus cripple the health of the emerging churches.

According to Thielman and Stott, the first four roles could all teach doctrine and the basics of the Christian faith.²¹ Nevertheless, Paul mentions the gift of teaching as the fifth gift listed in Ephesians 4:11. He lists it third in 1 Corinthians 12:28, after apostles and prophets. In Romans 12:7, Paul places it third after prophecy and service. He closely ties teaching with shepherding in Ephesians 4:11, and teaching is considered a qualification for one aspiring to serve as an overseer/elder (1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:9).

Indeed, there seems to be a group who specialized in teaching (1 Thess. 5:12; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Rom. 12:7; Acts 13:1; James 3:1). These teachers instructed the church in “the teaching” (1 Tim. 6:1). Paul points out the problem of false teaching in Ephesians 4:14 and makes it clear that teachers play a key role to help mature the body of Christ.

As the churches in Asia Minor continued to reach many Gentiles with the gospel, the need for the multiplication of teachers continued to be great.²²

²¹ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 276; Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 164.

²² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, *Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1070. Schnabel explains that Paul and Barnabas and teachers “taught a great many people” (Acts 11:26). Schnabel posits that the term “teach” referred to more than “missionary teaching in the synagogues of Antioch, but it may also

The Gentiles did not have the foundation of the Old Testament that the Jewish believers had, so the need to multiply teachers to provide ample training for the Gentiles continued to be critical. The teachers also exhorted the hearers to live in such a way that they lived out the teaching and explanations of the faith.²³

Amid a network of multiplying churches, the transmission of biblical teaching and training must be passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, the teaching function must consider the prevailing way a people group thinks on various issues and must point them to a biblical worldview. To incorporate this type of training at the grassroots level, elders must also be chosen to lead the churches, as the next section will briefly address.

refer to the instruction of new converts and of the believers in the church—that is, the ‘great many people’ of Acts 11:24 who had been converted through the missionary work of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.” Those that were disciplined and taught, it seems, became teachers as well. Thus, the number of teachers multiplied as Paul gave attention to discipling and teaching the believers. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 419. Schnabel points out “the fact that Paul repeatedly mentions teachers as an integral part of each local congregation” (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29, 14:6; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2). Luke also points out that prophets and teachers had a prominent role in the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

²³ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 261; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, 1070. Schnabel asserts that Luke’s comment in Acts 11:27 “describes the instruction of the believers in Antioch who were so active, or prominent, that they attracted the attention of outsiders, including the Roman authorities.” Although Paul saw himself as a missionary, seeking to preach to the Gentiles, he also saw the importance of “teaching new converts and the believers in the Christian community, taking time and energy that might otherwise be spent preaching to and conversing with unbelievers.” Paul saw the importance of equipping the believers to do the work of the ministry once he was no longer on the scene (Eph. 4:11-12). Part of the work involved training and equipping apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who would be able to equip others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Role of the Movement Strengthening Strategist in Networks of Multiplying Churches

When the IMB's affinity of South Asian Peoples created the position of Movement Strengthening Strategist in 2009, we did not equate it with the five positions listed in Ephesians 4:11. At best, the MSS role is a supporting role to the others, but especially for training pastors and teachers.

We were seeing that we were giving little attention to training pastors and teachers in many networks of multiplying churches that were emerging among Hindu peoples at the time. As a result, churches did not continue to multiply, and these networks of churches were not sustained over time. The core task of the MSS role is to address this issue by assisting the missionary team in equipping pastors and teachers within movements of multiplying disciples and churches.

Sometimes the MSS insured that training was passed on from generation to generation of pastors and teachers through those pastors and teachers who received the training. At other times, they found that they also needed to train pastors and teachers in other generations of churches.²⁴ In other words, the pastors who were trained in the first generation of churches did not always pass on the training—and the MSS had to train the second generation, too. Often, they mentored national partners who were gifted in shepherding and teaching into these roles. Many national MSSs now partner with the IMB to do this work across South Asia.²⁵

The MSS must have a mindset of urgency in order to multiply the training of pastors and teachers who may serve as elders in the emerging churches. Elders must ultimately be appointed and trained for the new churches within

²⁴ Nathan Shank, "Generational Mapping: Tracking Elements of Church Formation within CPMs," *Mission Frontiers* (November–December 2012): 26-30.

²⁵ In a letter dated March 3, 2022, J. H. (full name not used for security purposes) indicated that his team was training two thousand pastors annually across South Asia through national MSSs.

the network of churches, though the appointment of elders will lag behind the speed of the movement. By leaders appointing elders, the health and sustainability of the churches are more likely to be maintained over time.

One South Asian missionary has taken leadership training materials for pastors and teachers and multiplied it across more than nine networks of multiplying churches. Each of those networks now has national MSSs who have been developed. In 2022, those MSSs jointly held the first “North India MSS Team” meeting, led by two mature Indian MSS leaders. Those leaders had an opportunity to cross-pollinate through multiple networks and discuss key issues during that gathering. Numbers never tell the entire story, but those nine networks are training more than two thousand pastors annually. That number does not count the pastors and teachers who are receiving re-teaching and training by those who receive the training from the MSSs.²⁶

Conclusion

Multiplying leaders is crucial for sustaining a network of new churches. A new network of multiplying churches will not be sustained unless competent pastors and teachers are trained and equipped. The new believers will not grow to maturity, thus hindering the health of the churches. Intentionality is necessary.

As new churches emerge in a network and missionary team members are no longer available to train local pastors and teachers, someone will need to focus on that training so the movement does not falter and ultimately fail. Once local leaders are equipped to train pastors and teachers, the network

²⁶J. H.*, email message to author, April 21, 2022, *full name not used for security purposes. J. H. has served over fifteen years in South Asia and currently serves as an IMB Cluster Leader in South Asia.

of churches will ideally grow deeper and wider at the same time, knowing that ultimately it is God who causes the growth.²⁷

My desire over the years, that continues to this day, is to see healthy reproducing churches multiplying in such a way that does not sacrifice urgency for health or health for urgency. These churches instead hold urgency and health in tension in order to move the work forward among a people group or in a city on God's timetable and for His glory.

Todd Lafferty was elected executive vice president of the International Mission Board in February 2019. He and his wife, Susan, were appointed in 1991 as career IMB missionaries to a large South Asian city, where he was pastor of an international church and, later, a strategy coordinator. From 2000-2003, he served as a candidate consultant, based in Richmond. The Laffertys returned to the mission field in 2003, and his roles included strategy associate in the Pacific Rim region, interim regional leader of Pacific Rim, and the affinity group leader for South Asian peoples. Lafferty most recently served as pastor of mobilization for Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. He is a graduate of the University of New Mexico and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a Doctor of Missiology from Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary.

²⁷ Mikeal Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing House, 2008), 203. Parsons posits that the appointment of the elders (Acts 14:23) and their subsequent empowering to lead within those new churches led to healthy, vibrant churches.