

The Strategic Value of Saturation Church Planting

By Danie Vermeulen

Show me a denomination in decline and I will show you a denomination without a church planting vision. Show me a country where the Christian population is stagnant or in decline and I will show you the denominations within it, with no church planting vision. It stands to reason. Yet, there are now numerous countries that show major evangelical growth since the denominations and church groups settled on a specific national church planting goal. Examples of these are the Philippines, China, Brazil (in fact most of Latin America) Ghana and Zimbabwe. In every continent of the world there are church planting movements breaking through the barriers of evil resistance, bringing the glory of the Lord, the incarnate presence of Christ into their communities.

Jim Montgomery, Founder and President of Dawn Ministries, is possibly the most knowledgeable on this subject. He played a major role in developing a strategy in the Philippines in the early 1970's that would change the face of the Philippine church forever. IN 1974, when about 75 church and mission leaders committed themselves toward the goal of a church in every barrio by AD2000, a movement was born called DAWN – an acronym for *Discipling a Whole Nation*. For the Philippines, this would mean growing from about 5,000 churches to 50 000 in 26 years! ¹

In February 2001 they will have their celebration – 50,000 churches planted in 26 years! It has impacted the nation tremendously. Who dd it? Who should get the credit? The church, the Kingdom of God in the Philippines! They multiplied themselves over and over. Most denominations showed growth that outshone the growth of their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Why? They had a vision to saturate their nation with churches in every barrangay (neighbourhood).

SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING

Saturation Church planting is a vision that aims at mobilizing the whole body of Christ within an area, city, province or country to plant a church within easy access of every person in order to disciple the whole nation. (Matt. 28:19) At this juncture I must point out that Jesus' command to us was not to make disciples in the nations but to make disciples of all nations. This is a whole nation vision. Therefore, the mobilization of the whole body of Christ is so essential.

WHY SATURATION CHURCH PLANTING?

There are several reasons other than the Biblical basis why saturation church planting is the best method of evangelism. Let's look at some of them.

1. New churches grow faster than old churches

Why do newly planted churches grow faster than older churches? Because most often evangelism is their main activity. They break into new households of relatives and friends and if there is a building, something new is more noticeable. Also keep in mind that it is easier to give birth than to raise the dead!

1. Montgomery, Jim: **DAWN 2000, 7 million churches to go**. Highland Books - p5.

2. Church planting can give new life and vitality to your church

A new baby creates great excitement in a household. Kawit Baptist Church in Kawit, Philippines was planted in 1986 and reached a peak attendance of 50. When Pastor Arman Dela Merced arrived in 1993 the church was down to only 8 members! Pastor Arman, knowing that it is easier to give birth than to raise the dead used his dying church to plant a new church. Within 6 months they succeeded in planting a daughter church in Imus with 60 members! There was a great receptivity in Imus. But the amazing thing is that through giving birth, revival came to the church in Kawit. Their membership shot up to an incredible 96! ¹

3. More types of churches are needed

Churches are like people and have different personalities. It is often determined by the pastor himself. Theological persuasions also play a major role and often determine the liturgy in the services. God, in His infinite wisdom, created such variety in the expression of church that it actually becomes difficult for someone to say "I can't find a church where I fit in." We just need to continue to plant more types of churches that cater for all homogeneous groups.

It is also necessary to mention here that we are in desperate need of churches that will cater for all the needs of our youth. They need an expression where they will be comfortable with the dress code, music and liturgy. It is a well-known fact that the last generation style church will not appeal to the new generation.

4. Church planting develops new leadership

Peter Wagner says *"Many churches have confirmed the fact that the most important institutional variable for the growth and expansion of the local church is leadership...For the most part, existing churches have unconsciously placed a ceiling on both clergy and lay leadership and, as a result, upward mobility of new people into positions of ministry is difficult. But new churches open wide the doors of leadership and ministry challenges and the entire body of Christ subsequently benefits."*²

5. Church planting helps denominational survival

In his book, *"Church planting for a greater harvest"*, Peter Wagner makes this observation, *"Without exception, the growing denominations have been those that stress church planting."* Many denominations talk about church growth and has intentions to plant churches, but that is as far as it goes. They have neither a plan nor strategy and are often too proud to ask for help.

In South Africa, noticeable events have taken place, which I believe will impact this nation greatly. Dr. Isak Burger, Moderator of the Apostolic Faith Mission, is busy mobilizing his denomination to formulate a growth plan through church planting and they are by no means a declining denomination! A recent case study on this denomination is included in this publication.

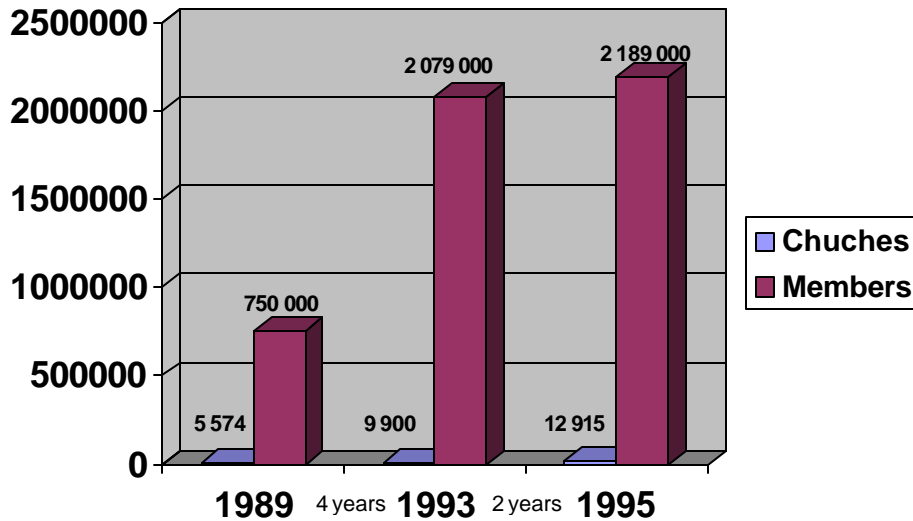
The Baptist Union also has a definite vision. The Cell Church Movement in South Africa, led by Pastor Harold Weitsz, is now writing church planting into their materials and has asked DAWN Africa to help them in this regard. But these are growing groups. What about those in decline? You can do what the Church of England in the UK did. They embarked on a DAWN project and after a 20-year decline they are now showing tremendous growth.

1. David A. White: **Your Church can Multiply**, Philippine Challenge, Inc. pp 11-12

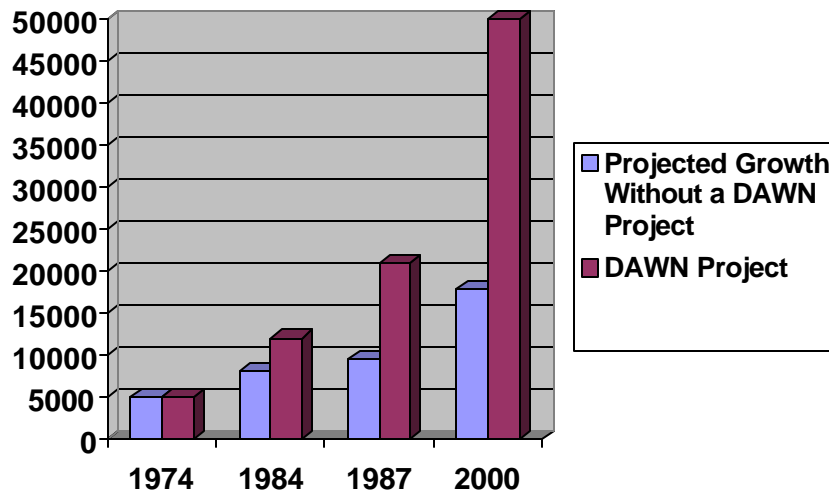
2. Wagner, C. Peter: **Planting churches for a greater harvest**, Regal Books – p.20

6. Church planting is the best method of evangelism in a nation

A study of the church growth in Peru shows a startling discovery. They have set a goal of 50,000 churches by the year 2003. That meant 6 new churches every day! But look at this: In 1989 they had 5,574 churches and it grew to 12,915 by 1995 – an Average Annual Growth Rate of 15.03%. In 1989 they had 750,000 members in their churches, and this figure grew to 2,189,345 by 1995 – an Average Annual Growth Rate of 19.55%! The conclusion derived from this is that membership growth rate is faster when planting churches.



I know of no other method of evangelism that can show such an impact on a nation! If the Philippine church did not embark on a DAWN project, they would have planted only 17,778 churches (projected) by the year 2000 instead of 50,000!



7. New churches can stimulate existing churches.

It is sad to say that in most cases, when a new vibrant church is planted within a community where there are already existing churches, there is often hostility toward the new church. Pastors are afraid to lose members to the new church. My advice to pastors is: Just keep growing green grass in your church and the sheep will not wander.

Older churches that have stagnated are often “challenged” by the newer churches into caring for their flock more effectively. New churches raise the level of religious interest.

The essential criteria for any community with more than one church is to see each other as part of the team that Jesus has called to “destroy the works of the evil one.” (1 John 3:8) Once a pastor can pray for more workers to come to the harvest field where he is laboring, he has truly become a Kingdom minister.

8. Church planting will bring a new awareness and compassion for the lost.

It is almost hard to believe that most churches spend 90% or more of all their resource on the already saved. The average church spends at least 90% of its finance on church members who have heard the gospel over and over. The average pastor spends at least 90% of his time on church members who are already saved. So we can go on and on. Churches stagnate when they become introverted in their church life, when are overwhelmed with their own needs and wants. Such churches lose vision and fall into “religiosity” rather than shakers and movers in His kingdom.

As a child I often watched the farm workers on a Sunday afternoon gather their dogs together to go rabbit hunting. Whilst there was no rabbit in sight, these dogs would snarl and snap at each other, but the moment they saw a rabbit they forgot about each other and went for the kill. So it is in a church, where there is no vision for the lost, the church members will bite at each other. After my 22 years in the pastorate, I know this to be a true fact.

When a church becomes involved in a church plant, a new passion for the lost will be evident. It is like a mother giving birth to a new baby.

9. Church planting will bring a world vision to your church.

Often, Christians hide behind the walls of their church. They are told not to mix with the “world” and sometimes they are discouraged to read secular material such as newspapers. How sad. We need to know what is going on in the world we are living.

There are thousands of Christians that know nothing about the unreached peoples of our world, the 10/40 Window or the lostness of Generation X! Churches that become involved in church planting are always looking for the unchurched, unreached and ignored. It is then that their eyes open and they become aware of the harvest.

I get so excited when I hear of churches that are planting new churches cross-culturally, making an effort to go to the “ends of the earth”. Some of the most

exciting times in my life as a pastor was when I was involved in planting churches in Malawi among the Yao, an unreached people group 2300 km's away from my church in South Africa. My church members developed a world vision!

10. Church planting often re-emphasizes the principle of sowing and reaping.

It is a biblical truth that “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Gal 6:7 NKJV). If we are talking about “planting” we automatically talk about “reaping”. When we invest finances into church plants we need to expect a harvest of finance for the planting church. If we invest people and staff in planting a church, guess what we will reap?

THE PRACTICAL PROCESS

If a nation is going to embark in saturation church planting, then a DAWN-type strategy is necessary. Jim Montgomery outlines 12 ingredients to a DAWN strategy. He says: “It is a strategy that:

1. Is Christ-centered in its emphasis on seeing Him made incarnate in every cluster of 500 to 1,000 people in the world;
2. Is built on the comprehensive plan of God who is not willing that any should perish;
3. Focuses on the systematic occupation of the land;
4. Takes advantage of the practical and emotional values of a whole-country approach;
5. Releases the incredible power of information;
6. Delivers a prophetic message to the Church;
7. Harnesses the vast energies inherent in working towards a measurable, time-bound goal;
8. Emphasizes the “best method under heaven;”
9. Helps the body of Christ function effectively as a body;
10. Releases the great potential of denominations;
11. Encourages parachurch organizations to function truly “alongside” the Church;
12. Provides a frame of reference for national and worldwide strategy for the discipling of the nations

Each of these 12 ingredients of DAWN is powerful in itself. When they are put together in symbiotic relationship, their potential is enormous.¹

1. Montgomery, Jim: **DAWN 2000, 7 million churches to go.** Highland Books - p5.

Dr. Murry Moerman¹, gleaning from Montgomery makes the observation that the details of how a saturation church planting project works, varies from country to country and situation to situation yet some ingredients are necessary:

- A person or group of persons earnest for the reaching of their country, as was the reformer, John Knox of Scotland, who cried out to God, “Give me Scotland or I die!”
- A national representative working committee that shares the vision and is willing to give of personal and organizational resources to guide this relatively simple process.
- The gathering and updating of relevant information regarding the current harvest force and harvest field in the country. From this can be gleaned a “prophetic message”, how God sees His Church in the nation and what He is saying to His people.
- Periodic national and regional gatherings of the leadership of the Church to consider what God may be saying and how each denomination may best respond for God’s purposes to be accomplished. These gatherings are frequently called “congresses”, to emphasize the decision-making element of response. Goals will be set and reviewed, progress celebrated, prayer for revival renewed and fresh commitments made.
- The commitment to continue the process until Jesus returns: mobilizing prayer, monitoring of harvest force and harvest field progress, dissemination of information in publications and congresses and sharing church planting models and resources.

1. Moerman, Murray: **Transforming our Nation**. Richmond BC Church Leadership Library Books, 1998 – p40.