

A Strategy for Global Youth Ministry

By Dave Patty

It was a powerful reminder, and not a cheap one at that. Four acres of beautifully maintained grounds, stunning buildings, restored to their old world glory. A library that boasted the most complete theological collection in central Europe. Four-color brochures that impressively laid out the credentials of a world class seminary that was...empty.

It was painful for all of us to hear the details. The seminary had an almost 40 year history, and a list of backers that included the massive Southern Baptist denomination. But when the walls of communism fell, the former location in a palace on the banks of a Swiss lake seemed to be less than ideal for capitalizing on the new opportunities in the east. A move to the outskirts of Prague would save money and put them much closer to the students of central and Eastern Europe. It was almost a no-brainer.

The sale of the property in Switzerland netted a cool 20 million, enough to capture a prime old estate in a quiet valley of Prague, close to the center but far enough away to escape the rush. And the cause was a worthy one. No one could deny that training of leaders in Eastern Europe was a crucial task. Volunteers responded from all over the world for the renovation project. Funds were available so that it could be done "right".

The job was finished in record time. Many came to admire the quality work. But for some reason no students came. Sure there was a handful, almost thirty. But only 4 of those were from the Czech Republic, and the entire group barely moved the air in a facility that was built to train up to 150. Soon they couldn't keep up with the overhead. Halfway through the second year the decision was made. Close the school and turn the facility into something that will pay the rent - a conference center for visitors from the west.

It was a tragic turn of events, but in essence something similar could happen to any of us who are involved in the task of training leaders overseas. Most likely the failure would not be on the same scale, but it could easily have the same elements - great energy, great plans, significant resources poured into a strategic cause that produces an initial burst of activity, yet minimal long term results.

Our task is huge, the time is short, resources are limited. How can we most wisely invest in the cause of global youth ministry? How can we leave a legacy behind that will last? How can we leave behind more than empty structures and programs?

It's difficult to find a definitive answer to that question. But I do have a proposal, one that comes from slugging it out on the international front for almost 18 years, and finding the most help from an ongoing study of the life on Christ. My proposal is that building a country wide youth movement in a foreign culture is similar to building a local youth ministry in that it roughly follows the stages of development modeled by Christ. The stages taught to thousands of youth leaders in the Sonlife Strategy course, are similar when the goal is broader one - it's just that the specific content of the

stages changes. Global youth ministry requires a careful understanding of the end product we want to produce, as well as the stages a ministry passes through on its way from infancy to maturity.

The end product

What is our final goal? What do we want to leave behind when we pack our bags and head to the next great frontier? As in any endeavor, if this is not crystal clear, ministry can very quickly become an exercise in wandering. Our commission from the Lord is compelling - make disciples of all nations. And as I think about impacting an entire country for Christ an additional phrase comes to mind: A movement of God among youth people. For me this describes the outcome of disciple-making great commission ministries when they have reached critical mass and begin to generate an energy all their own.

To say we want to see a movement of God communicates that we don't just want to do activities or events. We want to see extensive life change in young people. It says that we expect there to be a supernatural element, a work of the Spirit that cannot be explained or quantified. It shows that we are not satisfied with merely training leaders, we want to insure that those trained leaders actually do something that is tremendously effective at reaching lost young people when they get home. We want to produce something that has life, momentum, power, and focus. We want young people saying in the words of Peter, "we cannot help spreading about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

In addition, I believe this movement needs to have 6 characteristics.

1. Church based

When Peter made his great confession of Christ, the master responded with a compelling view of what was ahead. I will "build my church", he said, "and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matt 16:18). This is the only time in the gospels that Jesus says "I will build." And since the passion of Jesus was to build his church, that must be our passion too. If our efforts in evangelism and discipleship don't produce results in the local church than we have failed. Whatever other structures we create, the Church must prosper because of our activities; it must strengthen and grow because of our work.

Sometimes this is a difficult task, particularly in areas of the world where the bride of Christ is a little battered and crusty, more like a bitter old woman than an attractive radiant bride. In Poland we have struggled with this issue as we have watched churches splinter under the stress of legalism and infighting, or shrink back under the popular opinion that all non-Catholics are cults. Many groups have found that ditching the church rids the ministry of a lot of baggage, and opens up key doors into the broader venues of society. There has been pressure on our staff to do an end line run around the church as well. Pragmatically, it would greatly speed up the task of reaching lost young people.

But we can't. Theologically it is not an option, if we want to follow Christ's marching orders. Though it often takes more time, we must bring life to the Church. If no good churches exist, we must plant new ones. But whatever we do, we must build the Church.

2. Great Commission focused

As I mentioned above, generally when we link arms with the local church, we find ourselves very isolated from the lost world. Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32) We know, however, that work with sick people and sinners is messy. Left to ourselves we tend to gravitate toward safer, more sanctified circles and build walls rather than bridges.

Within 5 months of reaching the Czech Republic I took my first group of youth leaders through the Sonlife Strategy. They listened carefully, took notes copiously, and thanked me profusely for my insightful help. Sometime later, I decided to visit their ministries and see how they had applied the material. Several had taught it to their entire groups. One had even formed a ministry team. But I was discouraged to find that none of them were penetrating the lost world. Evangelism was often talked about, but no one really knew how to do it.

We later found that we practically had to hold the youth leaders hand and walk with him through the steps of making contact with people outside the church before they understood it. A great deal of energy had to be poured in to breaking down patterns in their approach to ministry that kept the isolated from the world. Events like English camps were especially effective in our area of the world, and gave the leaders a hands on taste of the principles we were talking about. And once the walls were broken and new believers started to be integrated into the Church, the entire training came alive with meaning.

Peer-to-peer evangelism as a style of life must be a characteristic of a movement of God among young people. It is this that gives the movement its energy, vitality, and transforming influence.

3. Christ centered

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (Acts 4: 15) The mark of the first disciples was not their speaking skills, well-developed programs or organizational skills. They had spent so much time with the master that his life permeated theirs. Wherever they went they talked about him, whatever they did they did in his name. Every conversation seemed to turn back to him, every theological or practical problem somehow related to him. This issue of Christ and his work so dominated their thinking that it eclipsed every other strategic issue. As Paul said "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (I Cor 2:2).

Young people caught up in a movement of God cannot be focused on the thrill of numerical growth, the innovation of outreach, or the excitement of something new. They must fall in love with the Savior and permeate their work with his presence.

4. Word dependent

I was nervous when Pavel's mom called me up and said she needed to talk. Knowing she was not very excited about her son's newfound faith I braced myself for an attack. Since she was a well-known doctor in our town of Havirov I was hoping the damage wouldn't be too widespread. But instead of frontal assault I heard pleading. "Would you please talk to my son and ask him to do his homework? Every night when I go into his room I see him reading his Bible, sometimes until 1:00 or

2:00 at night. He is ignoring his schoolwork, and every time I try and encourage him he just says that school has no eternal significance, but God's Word will last forever. I don't know what to do - I'm afraid he won't have a chance at college. Can you talk to him?"

I promised I would, and I did encourage Pavel to do his homework - and keep reading his Bible. And I prayed that the Pavel's of the Czech Republic would increase. A movement of God is marked by a hunger for the Word, and it is this very hunger that gives it staying power and keeps it from error. We want a radical army of youth who are passionate People of The Book.

5. Spirit empowered

In Jesus last words before he is taken into heaven he reviews his plan for the disciples to spread his gospel to the whole world. He also tells them how they will do it. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1 :8) It is impossible to achieve the plan of God without appropriating the power of God. And when God begins to move, the results cannot be explained merely by human activity. There is unmistakable evidence of his intervention.

A year after Pavel trusted Christ he ran into an old grade school friend of his who had moved to another city. They had been close pals mainly because of a similar approach to life - a sarcastic and self centered one. Martin didn't know what to make of the new Pavel - he was so radically different that he didn't even know how to relate to him or what to talk about. Finally he asked about his newfound faith and Pavel shared how his life had been transformed. Martin went home disturbed, started reading a Bible to make some sense of it, and then came to the summer camp to hear more. Two days into the camp, before we even had a chance to fully explain the gospel, Martin had yielded his life to Christ. He had been convinced of the reality of God by the radical transformation in the life of his friend.

This is what we long for and ask for as we pray for a movement of God among youth. And since we know the source of this power is the Spirit of God, we seek to be fully yielded to his work in our lives, and to "keep in step" with his desires. We ask for the power of the Spirit to be evident in our lives, and then to permeate the movement as a whole.

6. Self-generating and self-propagating

One of the significant characteristics of Christ's ministry is that he left. His followers were not happy about this - in fact, they stood there staring into the sky waiting for him to reappear. It was not until an angel showed up and reminded them of what was going on did they return to Jerusalem and begin to prepare to continue the work. I'm sure they would have been much happier to see him stay and chair the project himself. I'm sure they felt unprepared and unsure about the steps ahead. But for his work to be complete they had to stand on their own feet and continue the ministry without him. And the work needed to not just maintain, but grow and reproduce. That it did! .

In the same way, we need a plan that includes our departure, even though those around us will probably resist that possibility. But we need to leave in such a way that the movement actually takes a great leap forward in our absence. It must be self-sustainable, and have learned patterns of growth that are reproducible without a great infusion of foreign capital and talent. It must have a life of it's

own and that life must be vital and capable of expanding.

In Czech we have concluded that this means registering a nonprofit organization that is staffed by Czechs and exists to serve the local church in the area of youth leader training. In other countries the structure that is required to support a movement may look totally different. In any case, early on there must be some rough picture of what we want to leave behind, and decisions must be made to structure in a way that thrives in the local setting.

A clear view of where we are heading is essential, but equally important are the steps that lead us there. As stated earlier, I believe the development of a national youth movement follows stages similar to a local church strategy, though the specific contents of the stages are different. I believe the ministry must pass through a foundation phase, a deepening phase, a multiplication phase, and a departure phase. Each of these phases encompasses several key tasks that must be completed before the ministry can fully transition to the next level. Some of these tasks will be easy, some very difficult, depending on the local setting and the particular problems inherent in it. However, if any of these essentials are skipped, the ministry will suffer, and development in the next phase will be hampered.

Phase 1 – Foundation

The overall goal of the foundation phase is to lay a relational and spiritual base that will support both expansion and multiplication. This can be a frustrating phase since, just as in laying physical foundation, most of the work is below ground and only visible to those who are close to it. This phase also involves a great deal of disruption and digging - plain old hard "grunt work". But the returns down the road are well worth the sacrifice and effort that the foundation requires. There are six major sections of foundation that must be in place before serious work on the infrastructure can begin.

1. Language and culture

In each of the conferences I have spoken at this year in the Czech Republic I have found that I am the only foreign speaker. This is strange in the light of the fact Czech is home to a very gifted group of God's transplanted servants. The problem is that only a handful have reached the level where they can teach in the Czech language. As the youth leader for one of the denominations recently told me on the phone, "We want to use you because then we won't have to struggle through a translation." When a missionary delivers a message in Czech people immediately warm up, even if all the phrases are not perfect. They are tickled to hear an American who speaks their language - and know how difficult it is for us to learn.

The difference between involvement through translators and the connection that is made when a foreigner speaks the native tongue is huge. But getting there takes a great deal of hard work. Every language and person has a different timetable, but we try to set specific mile markers for members of our team. With hard work we believe a person can be conversational in 6 to 9 months, and able to teach in 2 years (though teaching at this point often requires a great deal of preparation). There seems to be another break point at the 4 year mark when teaching tends to become more relaxed and fluid.

To make this kind of progress, a new missionary needs to spend 15 to 25 hours of study and instruction a week for the first year, and then 10 to 15 hours for the second year. They need to very purposefully seek out opportunities to practice, and shift relationships from English to the local language as soon as possible.

Getting this study time in is always a fight, and often it is not a great deal of fun. The open doors and credibility that come down the road, however, are well worth the price.

In the same way, one should take advantage of the openness of the initial months to collect as many experiences as possible that will shed light on the local culture. Experiences such as teaching in the local high school, going to weddings, celebrating holidays, and hanging out in the town center on Friday night were all very helpful for us in building an understanding of Czech young people.

2. Emerging models

It seems in every ministry there are defining moments, "ah hah" experiences that open up new doors and bring clearer light to the situation. I remember one such conversation with Ivo, an elder and the youth leader in our local church. We were talking about the best way to equip leaders in the Czech Republic when he said, "You know Dave, I went through all your training when you first arrived, but it didn't really change the way I ran youth ministry. When I don't know what to do next, I don't think through what I have learned, I think about what I have seen and experienced. I finally started to understand what you were talking about when we did our first English camp, and then started regular outreach meetings together. Until then it was just another Bible course sitting on my shelf."

This made sense to me because it has been my experience as well. When I first went through the Sonlife training it was the live examples from Dann Spader's former youth ministry and the field trip to Son City that put shoes on the concepts I was learning. Without those experiences I would have questioned if the wonderful thoughts could truly be applied in the real world.

Sometimes the model ministry already exists in the country and all we need to do is uncover it. Other times it can be built by coaching some sharp youth workers and occasionally we need to build a new model from the ground up. In any case, we must be able to point to a local contextualized example of the principles we are talking about. They need to hear real live stories, and be able to visit and observe what the Lord is doing. Someone needs to have the personal experience to be able to coach them through the specific roadblocks they will face as they begin to build a great commission ministry in their culture. In Czech we found that the initial three model ministries did more to drive change than anything else we attempted. After others saw that it could be done they were anxious to learn and motivated to put it into practice.

3. Relationships and trust

Two days ago I was an invited guest at the national business meetings for the Czech Evangelical Free Church. I was planning on just sitting and observing, but was drafted up to the podium within the first hour to defend our internship program. An older pastor in an outlying church had heard some rumors about our ministry and voiced his distrust of Americans in general and our work in particular. I gave a brief overview of what we were doing, but could see that it didn't have much

effect in calming his fears. The air was tense, and I was praying nothing would blow up.

What happened in the next 15 minutes was something that couldn't have been planned. First the chairman of the denomination and then the general secretary voiced their support of our work. Each mentioned very specific changes they had seen in local churches or experienced working with us (the chairman has been in our home several times and taught at the internship program). Then five other prominent pastors stood and talked of the impact our work has had on their local church, of new believers that are now a part of the congregation and renewal that has come to the whole body. They emphasized that we had first served faithfully in the local context, and then, when there was fruit from that work, we begin to train those in churches nearby. It was the most powerful endorsement that we could have received because it was specific and voiced by men who had known us for several years and worked closely with our team. Their examples were concrete and nearly all voiced this phrase "we trust them." Trust is a very precious thing.

I thought of how different the situation would have been if it had happened 5 years ago, at the beginning of our ministry in Czech. Such a confrontation would have been almost inevitable had we begun at the national level, instead of quietly building relationships, trust and demonstrating faithfulness in the local context. The accusations made by the suspicious pastor would have been enough to close the doors to the rest of the denomination - if the base of relationship and trust, had not been already in place. As it turned out, the conflict actually worked in our favor. There is no way to mass produce a base of relationships and trust, the key people must be won one at a time. In Czech and Poland it is particularly sensitive because of their communist past and the many experiences they have with deception and manipulation. Words don't carry much weight - they watch for actions and substance. On the other hand, they are very good judges of character, and will form very deep relationships once trust has been established.

It is often tempting to shortcut this slow and tedious process. However, the short-term gains garnered by a top down approach are quickly cancelled by the closed doors that usually result. On the other hand, once a base has been established it can serve as a great protection and a source *of* increasing influence for years to come.

4. A core of tools or training materials

When the multiplication phase arrives, the focus shifts to spreading a renewed form *of* youth ministry as broadly as possible. In order to help that multiplication process, there needs to be a few tools, programs, *or* core training materials that are "debugged" and compact, capable *of* being passed on without a great loss in quality. The development *of* these core materials takes time, because they must be high quality and easily assimilated into a new context. Just as a "windows" computer operating system must be powerful and compact, able to function on a variety *of* platforms and applications, and well prepared once it hits the market, so we need robust transferable elements that can be easily reproduced. The key ones must be developed from the start, in the foundation stage. Later on they will be sorely needed and there will not be either the time *or* context to do them right.

One *of* these core elements for us was the Sonlife strategy seminar. I did an initial revision of the material in dialogue with my Czech partner and then had it translated. We taught it in small sections to a limited group *of* people, watching their response and encouraging feedback all along the way.

Then we evaluated how they had applied it in ministry and revised the training in the light *of* the results. In all, the basic course went through 3 revisions in the first year and a half. It was a "beta version", distributed to only a limited group until the bugs were worked out. Because *of* this initial work, we had a robust version of the training material to roll out when we began a partnership with the denomination to train youth workers on a national scale. Since then the basic course has been taught in a wide variety *of* settings, and has held up well, requiring only minor corrections along the way.

Another key tool for us was the English camp, which was a powerful context where we could model body evangelism. We tried it out in our local church and spent several years working the bugs out *of* the basic program. The first year we organized one camp, the second year three. This year we have 20 planned with 15 different churches and the program has been a great catalyst for change in a number of youth groups. It is easily transferable, and we know how to make it work in the Czech setting. .

On the growth level, a Bible study we created for new believers in our church has spread to a wide range *of* other settings, and material developed for training our ministry team has spread quite rapidly as well. The key is to develop these tools purposefully during the foundation stage and work out the bugs in small contexts with the expectation that they will be needed in a broader way not far down the road.

5. A core of nationals who share the vision

Jesus spent a great deal of time in his first year building a core group from which he chose his disciples. Most of this group continued with him as the ministry grew, and they provided the channels through which multiplication took place. It was interesting for me to note as I read Billy Graham's biography not long ago, that he is still working with many of the core men who began the ministry with him many years ago. This group has a passion and understanding of the ministry that people who come later often missed, and they provided for Dr Graham the pool from which he chose his key leaders.

Building such a core is a key goal of the foundation period. Since the goal is a national movement, this core must be made of key reproducers and may be from several churches or cities. However, it is important that we not relate to them just as individuals, but focus on developing a community among them, building them into a band of like-minded visionaries who love each other and know how to work as a team.

In Czech we have tried to create this region ally in our area of Northern Moravia. Regular meetings with the same group of leaders give them opportunity to build horizontal relationships, and a sense that they are a part of something bigger. We often emphasized sharing and prayer in these meetings, and purposely kept the numbers down to allow the relationships to "gel". This group of 20-25 people has been our key source for multipliers as the ministry has developed.

6. A fire

Somewhere passion has to ignite, lives have to be radically transformed, and God's power has to begin to be evident. Until this happens, the danger is that a dead program or empty structure will be

multiplied rather than a living, growing movement. This element is not totally within our control, but absolutely crucial. We must pray for it, plead God for it, bleed for it. There must be a hot passion for God and a driving love for the lost at the core of the young people we work with. It must generate a radical commitment and willingness to forsake all for the sake of the cross. And above all, we must model this fire ourselves.

In both Czech and Poland, this fire began in our first model ministries and was most generally sparked by new believers. It had to be tended and protected from the many forces that love to douse the flame. But such a fire is contagious, and tends to draw others around it into the flame.

Each of these six elements is crucial, and I believe all must be in place before we can begin to expand the ministry. If one is lagging behind, it deserves our special attention and prayer. It is not enough to merely strengthen the areas that are in place - the deficiency must be addressed and corrected.

Phase 2 - Deepening the core

When we originally mapped out our long term plan, I left out this phase, thinking that we could move directly from the foundation to multiplication. It was hard to make happen in real life, however. At the end of three years we had four model ministries, 40 youth leaders in training across the country, and open doors to exert great influence on the national level. At the same time, our time and energy were stretched to the end and there was no way to add any new activities without turning over some of the things we had already developed. But to whom?

The people were there - they had been working with us from the beginning. But we knew they needed some intensive input to take them the next step in leadership. They were good at local ministry, but didn't have the depth or maturity to multiply on a leadership level. If we delegated immediately to them, we would have to coach them very closely and give a great deal of time to make them successful. But time was something none of us had very much of. Each of these leaders was working full time in another job, or as a student, and there was no way they could take additional responsibilities, continue in their present roles, AND spend extended time deepening their own wells and broadening their skills.

Another option was to have them focus first on deeper growth, holding off increased responsibilities for a year until they were ready. That created other problems, however, because it meant that the load on us would increase, without allowing us to pass on the responsibilities we already carried. How could we go deeper without weakening the local ministries and youth leader training already in place? .

I wrestled with this problem for months. Often while driving in the car I would think out loud through the various options with whoever was riding with me. I think they got tired of the same broken record. Then one day, on an extended trip to a conference across the country, I was working on the issue again with my wife when suddenly I realized that I had missed the obvious. When Jesus reached this stage in his ministry he was able to accelerate the process because of the extended time he had with the 12. Each of them left their civil occupations to devote full time to the task of service and preparation. They made a radical adjustment of their lives to free up large blocks of time. When

I ran through this scenario in my mind with our key guys, it suddenly seemed like it would work. We had to somehow free these guys from their school or work responsibilities. The big key was how to actually pull it off.

The breakthrough came when we were able to get a special grant from a foundation in the States that allowed a group of 12 leaders from 7 churches to quit their jobs (or decrease them to half time) for a year. This freed up their time and energy for ministry and preparation. With more time and energy available we were able to deeply mould and shape their lives. All of this ties into the accomplishment of 5 goals that I believe are crucial to the deepening phase.

1. Pull some in close

After Jesus called the disciples to a deeper level of training he literally spent day and night with this band of men. For us this pulling in close happened on two levels, one with Vladek Lipus who came on full time as the director of our nonprofit, and the other with the 12 interns. The time spent with these few increased by orders of magnitude - from 3-4 hours a week to 30 or more. Some of them slept at our house three days a week, ministry trips and special projects put us in the car together for hours on end, and personal conversations often went late into the evening. They saw us when we were tired and frustrated, and we saw the same in them. All of us spend enough time together for the facade to wear off and the real issues of character and Godliness to come to the surface.

I was really looking forward to this kind of context, but was not prepared for how demanding it was. There were times when I wondered if it was going to be worth it, if the time invested in them was really going to pay off. Some of the growth seemed to happen much too slowly. I was reminded often of Jesus' words when he said in Mark 8, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?" It seems the disciples struggled with really catching what Jesus was saying as well.

Now that the program is drawing to a close, however, we are seeing the deep change that has happened in the lives of this band of youth leaders. We won't know for several years for sure, but it seems to have been worth it. More than anything I am encouraged by the fact that it is as close to Jesus' model as we could get.

Of course the specifics of how you pull in a few leaders very close will vary in every setting. Maybe it would be more informal, or would involve extended time in their settings. In any case, I don't know how you can get around this time of intensive preparation, if the step of multiplication is to really take off.

2. Deepen their training, focusing on areas of Character and Godliness.

It was interesting to find that the personal growth of our core group peaked out at a certain point. At the beginning they learned ministry skills and heart, but after a time their progress hung up, this time on character or personal issues. Peter, a gifted leader with loads of initiative, was driving people away with his self-centered attitude and explosive anger. Jarek, though he possessed keen insight into the Word of God and an unusual ability to communicate the truth, was missing many opportunities to build into his youth group because of fear and timidity. Jiri struggled with authority and submission,

and begin to alienate the elders in his church because he consistently ignored their input.

All of these issues had nothing to do with their ministry skills or understanding of leadership principles - they reflected core character deficiencies and immaturity in their lives. Because of that, a good portion of our input to them during this phase was in the form of correction, pointed instruction, and personal conversations about key areas of growth. We also focused heavily on a deeper understanding of the Word and theology, pushing them hard in their ability to study the Word and teach it well. These kinds of skills are not learned quickly, but form the core of youth leader's ability to feed the flock.

It seems as I study the life of Christ that he passed through a similar phase in his training of the twelve, when the focus was on content and character rather than skills or the mechanics of ministry. In any case, we know that the disciples possessed considerable depth when they finished their time with the master, and that this character gave them staying power through the leadership challenges that lay ahead.

3. Expand their world

Often young leaders learn to use a hammer, and then figure it will work in every setting. They experience ministry success, and assume they can capture the exact formula and port it to another situation. Often they feel like their work is the center of the universe, and are not able to draw on a broader pool of knowledge and experiences. Sometimes this causes them to get stuck on a basic ministry problem, limited by a lack of potential solutions.

It seems Christ purposefully exposed the disciples to a wide variety of settings, a broad range of people, and a large pool of ministry experiences. They saw ministry in the country and in the city, in homes and in the synagogue, with large groups and with a few. They worked with sick people and with intellectuals, supporters and angry opponents. Later on they were able to draw on this rich pool of experiences as they charted a course for the early church.

In order to provide this to our interns we took a number of ministry trips together, where we observed and evaluated other ministries. I tried to bring in strong people from around the area to share from the Word and describe what they were doing in their local ministry. We shared ideas internally among ourselves and visited each other's youth groups. And finally, we brought in a number of special speakers who were experts in their field to challenge and stretch their thinking. The result was a huge jump in creativity and ability to solve problems at the local level. Often their solutions were the results of creative synergy, and resulted in totally new ministry approaches. In any case, it made them much richer people, and thus much better equipped to lead others.

4. Delegate key areas, keeping them under close supervision

In our local setting we turned over the youth ministry in our local church to the interns, and gave those from other churches key responsibilities in the greater movement. They made significant mistakes in these roles and created some wonderful messes. Three non-Christians got totally drunk on a retreat where the rules had not been adequately explained, and several times I was up all night repairing materials that had been poorly prepared for a training event. But since we were in close contact with them these experiences turned into wonderful teaching opportunities, the kind that

cannot be replicated in the classroom.

Now they are starting to hit their stride in these roles and can be left on their own. This opens the door to broader multiplication without a drop in quality.

5. Help them bleed the vision

It seems that after an initial burst of energy, people become aware of the magnitude, of the task ahead and get lost in the trees. With Christ disciples this displayed itself in a preoccupation with the details of ministry (do we have enough food, lets build tent here for Moses and Elijah), or a return to a small vision and a small world (back to fishing again). Jesus kept the vision of the Kingdom before them, and continually pushed them out into the fields white with harvest. This is an ongoing task, and requires consistent monitoring. It is very easy for a group to become ingrown and lose the edge of a burning vision for the lost.

Please note that all of these goals could be accomplished with a totally different approach and structure than the one I have mentioned. I have given specific examples from our internship program because it is a live model, but there are probably much better ones out there. The key is to do whatever it takes to truly prepare the core leaders for broad positions of influence.

It is also interesting to note that the most effective multiplier of the New Testament, Paul, was not a part of this training process at all and joined the team at a much later date. In the same way, the Lord may connect some of the best leaders at some point later on down the road, and they may come to the table with the character and deepening issues already out of the way. However, the work of preparing the ones who God has already entrusted us with creates the conditions for attracting other top leaders later on.

Phase three – Multiplication

This phase begins relatively soon after phase 2, and provides a context for training the multipliers. We are just beginning this stage in earnest, and don't have enough of a perspective on it yet to propose a complete agenda. In any case, the main goal is to take what has gone deep and spread it as broad as possible, without losing its vitality or substance. Here key responsibilities must be delegated, and key reproducers must be trained to equip others. Structures and strategies must be put in place that deliver supplies to the troops and line of communication must be set up that focus and connect the activities. I see six main tasks.

1. Create structure and delivery systems

Does an organization need to be registered? Do people need to be freed up for training roles? How will it be financed? What kinds of published materials will be needed?

2. Expand evangelism

How can more people be reached? What is needed to spur more aggressive evangelism at a local level? How can more young people be equipped for peer to peer evangelism (i.e. SEMP etc). What are the most effective models? How can the be spread?

3. Expand training

How can we equip more trainers? How can the material be packaged more effectively? What are channels or groups of churches we have not yet penetrated? How can we motivate people to study and learn?

4. Form key coalitions

How does this interface with local training institutions (i.e. Seminaries, Bible schools), church structures (Sr. Pastors, Elders, Denominational leaders), information systems (magazines, publishers, radio), or other key influencers. What are the checks and balances that open doors but retain quality and final control? Who needs ownership, how do we position for maximum penetration?

5. Expand leadership base

How do you stay ahead of the top leaders? What material and input do they need to take the next step? How do you keep their ownership high and vision sharp? How do you keep investing the top performers, instead of getting sidetracked into fixing problem areas?

6. Champion the vision

How do you spread the vision, fan the flame, talk about the core elements over and over again until they become part of the warp and weave of the movement? Who are the cheerleaders, what events build momentum? How do you communicate success and inspire people to take risks. What new vehicles of communication are needed (i.e. key articles, hooks, Newsletters).

Of course this phase requires a number of structural decisions and key systems need to be put in place that maximize the resources. This structure needs to be constantly tuned and redesigned as the next step forward will generally leave the current structure obsolete. Great care must be taken that the structure serves the movement rather than becoming the movement or limiting it. Structure must always serve life, not the other way around.

Phase 4 - Departure

This is also a phase that is a bit ahead of us, but one we must always keep in mind. Mission strategists tell us over and over again of fine work that ceases to grow because the missionary will not take his hands from it. From personal experience I know this is difficult to do. After having built a ministry to Military teens in Germany that had 30 full time workers on staff and was touching over 1000 lives each week I turned it over to one of my best friends, and headed back to graduate school. All of us knew that it was time, and I was excited about the new ministry that lay ahead of me. At the same time it felt like abandoning my own child, or giving away a part of me. It was terribly painful, and all of us experienced a time of transition that was a messy one. Some areas of the ministry were weaker in my absence and that was hard to watch from afar. The new leader took a bit to hit his stride, and the entire work took on a different flavor, one that reflected his personality and gifts.

On the other hand, it grew in new directions, flourished, and is still reaching hundreds of military teens today. It has a life all its own, and will, I trust, be a potent force in youth ministry for years to

come. I am convinced it is much stronger today because I am gone.

We must plan on leaving. That means that every decision we make will keep that factor in mind. Structures must be sustainable, leadership must be broad, finances must be sound, and style of ministry must not be personality driven or dependent on one man's special gifting. People must be empowered, not controlled, and ownership and responsibility must be developed at every level. The true measure of effectiveness will be not what is happening today, but what is happening five years after we leave.

Of course, leaving can also destroy a work if it is not done right. If it happens too early, the ministry may not be mature enough to carry on in a vital way. And in any case, the relationships and support must be maintained, even though distance may separate. It is interesting to note how Jesus handled this in his upper room discourse with the disciples. He made it very clear that he was leaving them, but that he was not leaving them alone. He was going to prepare a place for them and leaving the counselor, the Holy Spirit, behind in his place. We obviously can't leave the Holy Spirit behind - he is already present. But we can think about how to leave other things behind, and how to continue in a role of support and encouragement, prayer and love. The pastoral epistles are good examples of this. Paul has turned over the reins, but has not ceased praying for them, thinking of them, loving them, or even exhorting over the distance. The local congregation was left, but not left alone.

Conclusion

I trust we don't lose the context for this all. Millions of young people all around the world are heading for an eternity in hell apart from Christ. We know the Savior that can make their lives whole. But they will not be reached apart from a massive mobilization of leaders and a huge wave of students committed to reaching their friends for Christ. We must think strategically and pray with great vision, that God will use our efforts to reach many thousands of these young people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A movement of God among young people around the globe that finds its home in the local church and penetrates society..