

Pioneer Church Planting Phases
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Please read “*Introducing the Pioneer Church Planting Phases*”.

See www.churchplantingphases.com for the latest version and related papers.

means see related paper(s).

I. FORMING, PREPARING AND LAUNCHING THE TEAM

This phase begins when someone is confirmed to form and lead a new church planting (CP) team. This new leader may already be on the field as a member of an existing team. This phase is comprised of all of the vital pre-launch activities aimed at forming the team and preparing for its effectiveness.

CRESTPOINT: Phase I ends and Phase II begins when the first team members (TMs) join the team leader (TL) on the field (though others may follow later).

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. The TL prepares a Vision & Strategy Paper (VSP).
2. The TL and TMs obtain approval from their sending church(es).
3. TL is appointed from sending organization.
4. Research best information available on language, history and culture of country and people group. Learn to see the people as God sees them. Research issues women in the country particularly face.
5. Research work roles and residency. Lay the groundwork for residency and identity (one’s visa, as well as being able to answer, “Why are you here?”).
6. Research practical life issues (e.g. housing, schooling, banking).
7. Prepare for communications, including secure email.
8. Research existing church planting efforts currently underway, if any, and begin communications with workers.
9. Plan for security issues.
10. Prepare family and prospective TMs for the transition to the field.
11. Resolve conflicts within the family that may arise from your calling and moving overseas.
12. Recruit the right team. Plan the kind of TMs and team you want. Whether you are starting on the field or from your home country, begin working with sending offices to identify candidates and initiate contact.
13. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Anticipate issues of life and ministry together; pro-actively communicate about them. TL and TMs discuss mutual expectations. Ensure each TM has a copy of and understands the policy on “recourse”.
14. Clarify the role of the TL wife.
15. Each member/family budgets for one-time outgoing needs and monthly needs. Raise sufficient financial support.
16. Develop a strong home prayer team.
17. Identify pre-field training needs, and see that this is carried out (e.g. in the people group’s religion, evangelism, culture, contextualization).
18. In particular, plan and get training for creating an excellent team language-learning program.
19. Get the team to own the vision and strategy for CP, adjusting it as appropriate. Build your

¹ Based upon Edition 2.0, February 1998, by Dick Scoggins, James Rockford & Tim Lewis.

- team unity and identity together.
20. Line up a ministry coach, as well as a business/NGO coach where appropriate.

II. LEARNING THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The CP team is now on-site and laboring to reach a level of proficiency in the language sufficient to effectively plant churches, which also involves an ever-deepening understanding of the culture. While the level of fluency aimed at may vary from person to person, depending on envisioned ministry roles, most will need to be in a mode of concerted language learning (LL) for 2-3 years. The workers develop a growing identity as *belongs* among their host people.

CRESTPOINT: Phase II ends and Phase III begins when most of the CP team have reached their appropriate level of fluency, and now are ready to spend most of their ministry time in disciple-making rather than language learning. Whereas evangelism probably took place before this point, it now begins in earnest.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. Members “land” and secure suitable housing. Learn how to function and enjoy life in your new environment. Adapt and renew your devotional life. Enable family to do the same. Make a plan for regular rest and a day off; develop a sustainable pace.
2. Continue to develop your role in society (i.e. job, business, humanitarian project, etc.). However, because being fulltime in language learning (or nearly so) is so important during this phase, job expectations should be kept as minimal as possible.
3. Address conflicts arising in the home.
4. Work through the *Peacemaking* manual² together as a team. Address conflicts arising in the team.
5. Develop your team life, in relationships, communications, accountability, and mutual support. Develop a spiritual team life that sustains members. Team meetings should include prayer, time in the Word, and strategic planning.
6. Appoint a Team Language Coordinator, who receives intensive training and creates a strong team LL program, including training and accountability. Link up with a language learning coach and other essential resources.
7. All work hard at learning the language. Husbands and wives work out respective strategies for appropriate goals.
8. Begin developing spiritual components of your language, such as learning special vocabulary and memorizing Scripture.
9. Clarify roles for team women and men. Work through differing expectations (e.g. regarding mothers of young children, business facilitators, etc.).
10. Develop relationships of varying depths with many local people, especially those who do NOT speak YOUR language. Enable family members to do the same.
11. Bring redemptive elements into your relationships. Look for those who already know the Lord or are spiritually sensitive.
12. Learn local forms of hospitality and become hospitable in that culture.
13. Seek opportunities to demonstrate God’s love for the people practically and culturally, standing alongside those in need in appropriate ways.
14. Grow in character through the stresses of adapting to your new life, not only personally, but also as a family and as a team. Develop the mindset when stressed by new things: “It’s not right. It’s not wrong. It’s just different.”
15. Collect evangelistic tools available in your new language.
16. Form links with any others in your area who are engaged in ministry to your intended

² Love, Rick. *Peacemaking*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001.

people group.

17. Before too long, bring in a coach—preferably a couple—to help in all of the above.
18. If not done already, seek to enter a relationship with a Team Leader Overseer (and wife) who can eagerly support your vision and give appropriate help.

III. PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

As most of the team has now reached a good level of fluency, they spend most of their ministry time seeking to share the gospel and persuade people to become followers of Christ. Some may share mostly with individuals, while others may seek to evangelize whole groups of naturally connected people. All team members will be engaged in “friendship evangelism” Most teams will also begin experimenting with different kinds of “apostolic evangelism”³. It is also common that teams *discover* one or more who already know the Lord, with whom close relationships are formed for the sake of fellowship, discipling and moving forward in CP. The team develops a tentative approach for how new believers can identify themselves in their faith to their broader community.

CRESTPOINT: The team is recognized as having moved to Phase IV when a member of the team is discipling a believer from the intended people group, who has a potential group of friends or relatives. However, members of the team do not stop sharing the gospel, for the sake of reaching more and more, breaking into new social networks, and being examples to the believers.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. If one’s ministry time in Phase II was perhaps 80% language-learning and 20% evangelism, it shifts to 80/20 the other way in Phase III. Develop a revised LL plan for the reduced but ongoing pace.
2. Develop an extensive network of prayer-partners in your home countries who can regularly intercede for your work. Every day tell God you are available and ask Him to direct you to those in whose hearts He is working.
3. Cultivate faith to believe God will lead friends to Himself.
4. Model Christ’s life before your friends and in your relationships, especially when difficulties arise.
5. If necessary, strengthen and adjust your role in society in terms of work, residency and viability.
6. Grow in your understanding on what are people’s felt needs, as well as their spiritual obstacles and opportunities.
7. Train together in effective ways to communicate the Good News and in vital apologetics.
8. Learn to share key Biblical truths and promises in the language. Memorize key Scripture verses, and possibly some verses from their holy book as well.
9. Share Jesus with many, and see an openness to the gospel develop in friendships.
10. Evaluate team members’ abilities and gifting in light of CP. Regardless of team members’ gifts, all can use their gifts *evangelistically* and contribute to the team’s overall outreach. Where helpful, two or three team members can work together, combining complementary skills (e.g. relationship-building with hospitality). Discern who from the team should be involved in which social networks.
11. Develop a strategy for reaching receptive people’s social and work-related networks.
12. Develop outreach tools and materials, bearing in mind different audiences (socially, men/women, children).
13. Start a Bible Study with a friend and see it grow into his or her social network.
14. Regularly pray in Jesus’ name for those who are sick or have urgent needs.

³ Sometimes defined as “Any bold evangelism outside your neighborhood.” Usually involves a program, plan or event. ☑

15. Lead someone into following Jesus, preferably with others in their social network.
16. Learn what are the marks of a “man or woman of peace” (M/WOP), or “respected person” in the culture.
17. Prayerfully evaluate your friend as a respected person in society (i.e. M/WOP) or as an avenue to such.
18. Identify one or more potential respected persons.
19. Begin to discern what is the good news for this social network and the respected persons in it.
20. Somehow introduce “Jesus” into the conversation within 30 minutes of every new person you meet.
21. Follow up any leads regarding existing believers.
22. Plan and begin to implement some kinds of “Apostolic Evangelism”.
23. Every team member should develop multiple ways of meeting new people (e.g. clubs, sports, etc.).
24. Implement a systematic way within the team to stay focused and motivated in the invaluable job of sowing many seeds.
25. As you lead people to Christ, or you form relationships with existing believers, invite faithful ones to a deeper discipling relationship.
26. CPer baptizes the believer(s).

IV. DISCIPLING BELIEVERS AND WORKING TOWARD GATHERING

Discipling one or more believers, especially working with them to win their social network to the Lord. From the earliest days with new believers, CPers teach that truly following Christ is *in community*, and that Christ wants to form a new group of His followers, committed to one another and, indeed, committed to growing and reproducing. As people come to faith and grow in Christ, the CPers seek to form individuals and existing groups together as the Body of Christ. Progress toward *gathering* will likely involve a variety of *pre-gathering* activities (e.g one-off get-togethers, building bridges between believers, etc.).

CRESTPOINT: Discipling never stops. But the team moves to Phase V once there is a fellowship group of 3 or more believers of the people group regularly meeting together.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. Use a plan of Bible study for the believer’s personal growth and development.
2. The believer(s) learn Bible stories that will impact life practices.
3. Come to understand the place of suffering in the Christian life (such as we see in I Peter).
4. Respond to sin by repentance and developing new patterns of life.
5. Live out Christ’s life in the extended family (e.g. Matthew 5-7).
6. Develop godly patterns in husband-wife relations including: godly submission and loving leadership, resolving conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation.
7. Develop godly patterns of child raising.
8. Develop a regular habit of turning to Scripture and prayer.
9. The believer(s) shares the good news with family and friends and God’s plan for Kingdom communities.
10. CPer(s) helps new believers break any occult involvement.
11. Believers who are already baptized baptize new believers.
12. Where appropriate introduce local believers to each other with the aim of fostering trust and fellowship. Host one-off events (e.g. birthday parties) as a “safe” venue for trust relationships to form over time.
13. The CPers decide which believers should be gathered together in fellowship, and which should be developed as starting points for separate fellowships.

14. Continually teach believers the New Testament concepts of fellowship and community, so that they will own the conviction of being linked with other believers in *ekklesia*⁴. Help them obey Christ's teaching about relationships with other believers, conceptually and in practice. ☑ See a fellowship group formed.
15. Begin to identify believers' gifts and calling in the Kingdom.
16. Implement godly patterns of conflict resolution with you, the church-planter, and with others.
17. Become familiar with God's plan for the extension of the Kingdom from the book of Acts.
18. Men disciple men and women disciple women.
19. Help the believer(s) develop how to present their identity in Jesus to family and friends.

V. DEVELOPING THE BODY OF BELIEVERS

Working with the new community of faith—and especially with emerging leaders—in order for them to grow numerically, in personal and corporate *koinonia* maturity. This crucial phase includes them developing a group identity and mutual commitment to one another as the Body of Christ, and also grasping a vision for leading others to Christ and forming new fellowships, locally or in neighboring places. Generally speaking, the team is either working with a single fellowship at this point that they hope will grow to medium or large size, or else they are aiming at a network of small house fellowships. In the case of house fellowships, the numbers below are evaluated collectively, in total.

CRESTPOINT: Phase V ends and Phase VI begins when the fellowship reaches these criteria of size and depth (“critical mass”):

GROUP COMMITMENT: The local believers have committed to one another and see their assembling together as an expression of being a local *church* (using whatever word is most suitable for *ekklesia* reality).

SIZE: Around 10 or more believers of the people group regularly involved, including older believing children. This does not necessarily mean that meetings average 10 or more, just that there is regular involvement of the 10+.

BREADTH: 3 or more married men (heads of households), and 2 or more mature women, of local believers regularly involved (whether or not their spouses are believers, though that is clearly stronger).

LEADERSHIP: At least 2 key believers who seem to be “elders in the making”, who are assuming more and more shepherding and overseeing, and whom the others recognize as leaders⁵.

STRENGTH: Not all hidden believers with hidden faith. Some believers are baptized and have already faced serious threats and persevered, maintaining their faith and their “confession of Christ before men” (Mt.10:32). Believers regularly share their faith; prayer and planning have begun for starting a *sister* fellowship.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. The community is meeting together regularly for worship, fellowship, instruction, and prayer. Passages such as Acts 2:42-47 are studied as an example to follow.
2. It is not uncommon for CPers to do substantial teaching and leading in the group early on, depending on the maturity of the believers and the group.
3. Local believers develop their identity together as a community of faith (e.g. through *covenanting*). ☑

⁴ The Greek New Testament word for *church*.

⁵ While the authors of these Phases see the New Testament teaching a variety of leadership roles for both women and men, they believe that the office of elder is limited to men. That being said, they also recognize and respect that others in the Body of Christ believe otherwise.

4. The group develops their sense of spiritual identity to those outside as well.
5. Older believers determine appropriate way for membership in the community.
6. Older believers understand and model Biblical “one anothers” which define community.
7. Believers learn to break previous or active occult involvement of new members. (See Acts 19:11-20)
8. The community celebrates the Lord’s Supper, with older believers presiding.
9. The believers are doing the work of evangelism with their family and friends.
10. Older believers have baptized new believers.
11. Older believers disciple new believers.
12. Older women believers disciple newer women in Titus 2 skills and other needs.
13. Believers learn to support each other through persecution, interrogation and hard times.
14. Believers develop an attitude of sacrificial generosity towards the poor and needy, particularly to other believers in need. They begin to seek opportunities to demonstrate in practical ways Christ’s love for those in need.
15. Community meetings are organized by believers. Older believers trained to lead community meetings (various components). Certain mature or gifted believers given opportunities to teach the Word.
16. Appropriate male/female roles in public meetings determined and practiced.
17. Mature believers are emerging and begin functioning as shepherds.
18. Growth in godliness in the home of emerging leaders sets the pace for the community.
19. Multitude of gifts encouraged and developed for edification of the community.
20. *Peacemaking* skills exercised by the community. Believers forgive and forbear as normal hurts occur.
21. Past family hurts explored and forgiven.
22. Believers adequately contribute to the support of their extended family.
23. Confronting, exhorting, reproving of erring members.
24. Shunning and disfellowshipping those persisting in sin.

VI. EMPOWERING AND INSTALLING LEADERS, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF REPRODUCTION

A continuation in the growth of *body life* and Kingdom commitment in the new *ekklesia*, with the CPers now focusing primarily on developing multiple leaders, especially potential elders. The CPers intentionally take a lower profile in the fellowship. They are also looking to recognize those believers with possible evangelistic gifts who are keen to share the gospel and initiate CP ministry in other locations.

CRESTPOINT: The appointment of 2 or more elders from the people group over the church (or network of house churches)⁶. And the church has embraced a Great Commission vision.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. Some or most CPers withdraw from believers meetings and focus on starting new fellowships. One or more CPer(s) remain involved, but adopt lower profile. Leaders-in-training spend time with the CPers in all sorts of contexts—not just teaching or worship settings—so that CPers’ behavior can be modeled in every setting.
2. If not already in place, the church commits to times of corporate prayer, acknowledging their full dependency on Christ as His Body.
3. Older believers exercise deliverance ministries in the community.
4. Gifts encouraged and developed for edification.
5. Married believers are specifically helped in their marriage relationship and character issues by older believers or CPers.
6. Church life and leadership concepts are taught and implemented. Believers determine

⁶ 3 or more is better.

- ways to develop healthy biblical community life.
7. If there are other churches around, begin to network emerging leaders with leaders of other groups as appropriate.
 8. Intense teaching on reproducing communities. Community embraces goal of reproducing and networking.
 9. Local believers and expat CPers look for new men and women of influence around whom to start new fellowships.
 10. Older, more mature believers trained to take leadership of community gatherings. Believers take responsibility for Biblical instruction. Several given chance to “try out” leading meetings, teaching the Word, and leading the body in worship.
 11. Respective avenues for men’s and women’s leadership identified and promoted.
 12. Mature believers preside at the Lord’s table.
 13. If there is one strong leader, he or she is taught and implored with the biblical necessity of plural leadership in the church and enlisted to make that a reality. Their broader ministry should be encouraged in multiple fellowships.
 14. Erring members are confronted, exhorted, reprovved and helped. Those persisting in sin receive church discipline according to the NT.
 15. Discerning the will of the Lord by leaders and community taught and practiced.
 16. The body continues to discuss and refine their identity vis. society around them. They decide whether to be an underground church or an open, perhaps registered church.
 17. There are special activities, parties or retreats outside regular meetings for outreach and fellowship.
 18. Leaders’ place in conflict and peacemaking in the community taught and practiced.
 19. Ephesians 4:11-12 giftings recognized and appropriate forums established for developing these gifts. CPers encourage believers with possible evangelistic gifts to share the gospel boldly and start ministries in other locations, with substantial prayer backing from the body.
 20. CPers select elder candidates in consultation with the believers. Those who agree to undertake this process are introduced to the church as “elder candidates”, and the Body is urged to help.
 21. Elder candidates begin special process of character growth, examination of motives, and intensive learning about *ekklesia* and shepherding.
 22. Meetings of leaders begin with CPer present. Team spirit develops amongst leadership. [Men and women leaders may meet separately or together, as appropriate.]
 23. Conflicts about leadership appointment dealt with. Those not selected may need special encouragement.
 24. Leaders look for new ones to develop as leaders and begin to mentor them (e.g. prospective deacons).
 25. CPer often absent from fellowship meetings. New leaders lead.
 26. CPer sometimes absent from leadership meetings.
 27. CPers appoint some or all of the elder candidates (if there are two or more; preferably three or more). Elders formally ordained.

VII. REPRODUCTION & MOVEMENT

The church or churches are now somewhat mature and are under the leadership of local elders from the people group. The CPers now labor for a wider spread of the gospel, with emphasis on church reproduction and a CP movement. There are two primary avenues for the CPers to make this happen:

- A. Working with the newly planted church or churches to help them reproduce and work toward a CP movement. AND/OR

B. Mobilizing, training, facilitating and possibly overseeing local CPers. This option may eventually mean creating a national sending structure.

CRESTPOINT: In a sense, this phase never ends, as the ministry has hopefully ignited a spreading of the gospel and multiplication of churches that becomes a movement. CPers may exit after the completion of Phase VI (appointing elders). Some, however, may stay on for varying lengths of time in order to strategically catalyze church planting reproduction and/or mobilization of local CPers.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. The local elders fully assume shepherding and feeding responsibilities in the church, including protecting the faith and doctrine of the community (Titus 1:9).
2. Deacons are appointed, as needed, to help the elders.
3. Vision developed for planting new churches in the local area.
4. Role of expatriate CPers determined (see 'A' and 'B' *primary avenues* and *Crestpoint* above). Responsibilities between CPers and local elders defined for the new community.
5. CPer(s) redefines relationship to leaders as *coach*, attending leadership meetings only when invited.
6. Great Commission vision includes recognizing, training and sending local evangelists and church planters to other cities, and even to other countries.
7. Vision given by leaders to congregation.
8. Evangelists guided to go out to other cities, towns or villages.
9. Indigenous CP teams sent out by themselves or with expat team.
10. New gatherings started.
11. Ephesians 4:11-13 gifted believers regularly visit other churches and emerging fellowships.
12. Elders and Ephesians 4 ministers take responsibility to develop new leaders and new Ephesians 4 ministers.
13. Leaders begin to network with emerging leaders of new gatherings including taking some responsibility for their training.
14. Communities concerned for each other and resources shared (especially Ephesians 4 equippers).
15. Peacemaking skills are practiced among leaders.
16. Leaders formally recognize newer emerging leaders (e.g. new elders or deacons).
17. Expat CPer(s) commends old community to God and leaves community meetings, but may visit on occasion.
18. Elders (with church planter(s)) lay hands on new elders in the newer community.
19. Relationship between different communities and leaders worked out and formalized.
20. Peacemaking skills between communities and leaders communities exercised.
21. Especially with model 'B' above, some means developed to mobilize gifted and proven national CPers (e.g. bivocational roles, administration, etc.).